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21 March 2014

Mrs J Dymond  
Acting Headteacher  
Sutcombe Community Primary School  
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EX22 7PW

Dear Mrs Dymond

### **Ofsted 2013–14 subject survey inspection programme: English**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 4 March 2014 to look at work in English.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The school has experienced significant disruption in recent months. The substantive headteacher has been absent long-term since December 2013. At the time of the inspection, the interim arrangements for leading the school had been in place for a few days. Currently, you are leading the school part-time and pupils in Years 2–6 are taught by supply cover. The number of pupils on roll at the school has reduced by approximately one third since July last year.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; observation of four lessons; and listening to pupils reading.

### **The overall effectiveness of English requires improvement.**

#### **Achievement in English requires improvement.**

- Pupils' progress in writing is too variable. The quality and length of written work in books lack the consistency necessary for pupils to make strong progress across Key Stage 2. The more able pupils do not always achieve as well as they should because the work they are given in lessons is not always demanding enough. Consequently, too few pupils attain the higher National Curriculum levels in writing.

- Standards in reading and writing fluctuate across the school, reflecting the exceptionally small number of pupils in different year groups. When taken over the last three years, pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 is below the average in reading and in line with the average in writing. By the time pupils leave the school, their attainment is generally above the average in reading, yet remains in line with the average in writing.
- In lessons, pupils write with sustained concentration and demonstrate a secure understanding of the key features of different types of text. When reading aloud, younger pupils use their secure knowledge of letters and the sounds they make (phonics) to sound out unfamiliar words. Older pupils are enthusiastic readers, but they have a limited grasp of the Dewey system for classifying the content and class of books, which limits their ability to make use of a library, and they are unsure how to scan a text in order to locate information quickly.

### **Teaching in English requires improvement.**

- In literacy lessons, teachers do not always plan learning that is matched closely to the needs of individual pupils. On these occasions, the subsequent writing tasks are not pitched at the right level so a minority of pupils, especially the more able, find the work is too easy.
- Pupils are unsure of the next steps they should take to improve their reading and writing. This is because the guidance they are given by teachers is not clear enough. Teachers' comments in books provide detailed feedback on how well pupils have achieved the learning intention, but seldom advise pupils how to improve the work that follows. Pupils' individual learning targets in reading and writing are not linked closely to their learning in lessons. There are few examples of pupils' own writing on display to illustrate specific aspects of grammar, punctuation or handwriting.
- Phonics is taught well. The youngest pupils participate enthusiastically because the sessions are well-structured and interesting. In these lessons, the teacher confidently shows pupils how to enunciate different letter sounds and acts swiftly to correct any mistakes. Such effective teaching accounts for the higher-than-average results that Year 1 pupils achieve in the national phonics screening check.

### **The curriculum in English requires improvement.**

- The current schemes of work for English do not build systematically on what individuals and groups of pupils have achieved already. Consequently, their knowledge and skills in the subject are uneven. There are few opportunities for pupils to learn through drama. While teachers make good use of high-quality texts in lessons, the choice of authors and styles of writing available to pupils in the library is too narrow.
- English is taught through a range of cross-curricular themes which capture pupils' interests and enable them to develop their reading and writing skills through other subjects. For example, pupils have learnt about the key features of report writing by writing and delivering a multi-media

presentation about China to parents. Visits to the locality are used effectively to support pupils with their writing. Pupils' enjoyment of reading is promoted well through a variety of enrichment activities, including book-related celebration events and theatre workshops.

**Leadership and management of English require improvement.**

- In a very short time, you have used your specialist knowledge and experience to evaluate how well English is taught. You have begun to establish a clear vision for developing the subject and worked with staff to improve aspects of teaching. The school has a clear action plan in place, but the interim objectives need refining so that the school's progress towards end-of-year objectives can be evaluated more easily.
- There are appropriate systems in place to check the quality of teaching and learning in English. However, the records of previous monitoring activities do not comment on the difference that teaching makes to pupils' learning.

**Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- matching the learning intentions and writing tasks closely to pupils' capabilities so that all pupils are challenged, especially the more able
- using individual learning targets, written feedback and pupils' own work to ensure that each pupil knows what he or she should do next to raise attainment in reading and writing
- setting out in detail how specific knowledge and skills in English, including drama, will be taught to individuals and groups of pupils who may spend several years in one class
- implementing the revised action plan for English and checking rigorously that the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement in the subject improves.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop English in the school.

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Ian Hancock**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**