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19 March 2014

Mrs G Pears  
Headteacher  
Blessed Dominic RC School  
Lanacre Avenue  
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London  
NW9 5FN

Dear Mrs Pears

### **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 12 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 evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; observation of five lessons and a learning walk.

### **The overall effectiveness of English is good.**

#### **Achievement in English is good.**

- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 has been variable in the past, but a relentless focus on English in the last three years has resulted in a steady improvement in pupils' achievement. Last summer, the proportion of Year 6 pupils attaining the expected levels in reading and writing was higher than the national average and a high number of pupils exceeded expected levels. As their attainment was below average at the end of Key Stage 1, this represents good progress.
- In Key Stage 1 attainment in reading and writing has also improved significantly over the last three years, although too few pupils are reaching the higher levels, particularly in reading. The school's records show that more pupils in the current Year 2 are on track to reach gain higher levels in reading at the end of this academic year.

- Last summer's Year 1 screening in phonics (linking letters with the sounds that they make) showed that pupils were achieving better than average. This is due to effective teaching of phonics and the opportunities provided for pupils to apply their skills to wider reading across subjects.
- Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills in communication, language and literacy that are below those expected for their age. The majority of children have English as an additional language and many are new to speaking English. Inspection evidence confirms that children attending the school from the beginning of Nursery to the end of Reception make good progress. This is because of the effective systems in place to support pupils' language development.
- You, and other leaders, closely analyse how well different groups of pupils perform. Groups of pupils, such as those who qualify for additional government funding (Pupil Premium) or those who arrive in school at different times with little or no English, make good or better progress. In some classes, pupils who are eligible for additional funding now achieve better than other pupils in writing.

### **Teaching in English is good.**

- Teachers use a wide range of resources to plan lessons that capture pupils' imagination and engage them in learning. In one lesson, pupils were reading *Cosmic* by Frank Cottrell Boyce. They acted out parts of the story, watched video clips and were writing emails to one of the characters. All pupils were clear about their writing targets. The teachers were providing effective feedback to pupils as they were writing. Consequently, pupils were checking their work carefully and making good progress.
- Drama and speaking and listening opportunities are often used effectively to improve and enhance pupils' communication skills. During the inspection, pupils were preparing to enact a mock 'court case' involving the *Highwayman*. They understood the particular language devices they were expected to use and they were eager to succeed. Such approaches support and extend pupils' confidence in English.
- Pupils are enthusiastic readers because they are encouraged to read widely. Pupils' comments include, 'We learn new words and if you read a lot you find it helps you when you write.' Work in pupils' books shows that most pupils are writing at length and across a range of forms and styles. As a result, standards in writing are improving.
- You have had a strong focus on improving teachers' marking. Most marking is now detailed and identifies appropriate 'next steps' for improvement. However, in some classes, teachers' comments are not precise enough to support improvement. Standards of presentation and handwriting also vary across the school. .

## **The curriculum in English is good.**

- You have recently made changes to the English curriculum. Teachers are using books from some of the best-loved children's authors to plan English lessons. Pupils value these 'class readers'. Their comments include, 'I don't like reading, but I do like these books – they push you to the limit – they inspire you.' 'Teachers bring these books to life for us!'
- Strategies to keep ahead of national changes and continue to raise standards are effective. You have included the new National Curriculum requirements for grammar and spelling into your curriculum. You are closely checking that this is supporting improvements in pupils' writing.
- Your curriculum makes good links to pupils' home languages, cultures and beliefs. As a result, pupils respect each other and value language learning. They are proud of their school and of their achievements in English. 'I can't explain how I learnt English so quickly. When I came here I only knew two words - *hello* and *goodbye*.' Pupils particularly value the 'International Evenings' when they perform stories, dances and songs from around the world. This makes an important contribution to their spiritual, social and moral development.

## **Leadership and management of English are good**

- The newly appointed English subject leader has a clear focus on improving the reading, writing and speaking and listening skills of all pupils. She is well supported by you and other senior leaders. The senior leadership team has high expectations and is determined to continue to raise standards in English and literacy for all groups of pupils.
- You have organised effective staff training for teachers and teaching assistants. This has improved the quality of teaching, particularly phonics teaching and the use of speaking and listening to support writing.

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

- ensuring that all teachers provide clear guidance in their written feedback so that pupils know how to improve their work
- tackling weaknesses in presentation and handwriting ensuring consistency throughout the school.

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

**Marilyn Mottram**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**