

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
F 020 7421 6855
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr Ferguson
Headteacher
Tweedmouth Community Middle School
Billendean Terrace
Spittal
Berwick-upon-Tweed
Northumberland
TD15 2DJ

Dear Mr Ferguson

Ofsted survey inspection programme - English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 30-31 January 2007 to look at work in English.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject the visit had a particular focus on our current survey theme: provision for poetry. 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of two lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards in English

Overall standards and achievement are satisfactory.

- Test results at Key Stage 2 show steady improvement over recent years, despite a dip in 2005, and were average in 2006.
- The full range of evidence shows that pupils' reading, writing and speaking and listening are in line with national expectations for this age group.
- Achievement is satisfactory overall. However, few pupils reach the higher levels, some girls underachieve in relation to their prior attainment, and boys attain less well than girls.

- The standard of pupils' work in English in Years 7 and 8 is also satisfactory.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

Teaching and learning are satisfactory.

- Most lessons seen were coherently planned towards clearly defined goals.
- Work is accessible and appropriately challenging for all in the class. Success criteria are usually made clear and used to aid and evaluate progress.
- In most lessons, pupils had time to practise new skills in pairs and through sustained independent work; materials and activities motivated close reading and writing with a clear sense of purpose and audience.
- In some lessons, teachers' skilful questioning and management of class discussion enabled pupils to speculate, investigate and reason.
- The less successful lessons, though satisfactory, gave limited opportunities for pupils to discuss their ideas and had less good pace, challenge or planning for independence in learning.
- Assessment is developing, but lacks the consistency to make a significant difference. Some marking responds carefully to what has been said as well as how it has been presented. Short term targets are set for most pupils but follow up is not usually thorough. Some teachers make too little use of assessment within the lesson.

Quality of curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- Teachers make the subject interesting and relevant to young people's interests and aspirations through their choice of resources and activities, including some extra-curricular opportunities.
- Plans provide for progression and a suitable balance of reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management of English are satisfactory.

- Standards have improved at Key Stage 2 and the commitment to raising achievement across the age range is evident. Having separate coordinators for each Key Stage deploys experience appropriately but has not encouraged consistency.

- In Key Stage 2, an appropriate action plan to raise standards is being implemented, good practice is being shared across the team, and a system to record assessment and track progress is being developed.
- The Key Stage 3 coordinator works with her colleagues in partnership schools to analyse assessments and prioritise areas for improvement, which are adequately reflected in the teaching for pupils in Years 7 and 8.

Provision for poetry

Provision for poetry is good.

- Pupils experience a good range. Younger pupils read a mixture of fun and serious poems and learn how to use “the writers’ toolbox” by writing poems in different forms. In Key Stage 3, pupils progress to investigating more challenging poems, and engage well with contemporary poetry.
- Staff are interested in poetry. Some produce their own anthologies and seek out poems which will appeal to their pupils. Sometimes school visits have included an encounter with poetry.
- Younger pupils, both boys and girls, are proud of their own versions of the poetry they have read, such as “The Magic Box”, and point out favourite features. In Key Stage 3, some engaging teaching and marking which responds to meaning has led to individual and well crafted poetry writing.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is satisfactory.

- Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities make progress in line with expectations, because of good provision for their individual needs.
- Underachievement in the subject by boys, and some girls, has been recognised and addressed, but remains an issue.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards in the subject, particularly for the identified groups of underachievers and those at risk of disaffection
- developing consistent use of assessment to inform planning.

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

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority/Local Learning Skills Council. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term and made available to the team for the next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Susan Bowles
Her Majesty's Inspector