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Dear Mr Stokoe

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 3 December 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: independent learning 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.

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 three lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be inadequate. However, there are emerging signs of some improvement.

Achievement and standards

Standards in English are below average overall and achievement is inadequate.

- In previous years, standards in English were average by the end of Year 6 and the pupils' achievement was satisfactory, although it has declined in recent years. In the National Curriculum tests in 2007, the standards attained by the pupils in Year 6 were below average and their achievement was inadequate, continuing the downward trend.
- The inspection showed that there are emerging signs of improvement in achievement at Key Stage 2, particularly in reading. However, these are not yet fully embedded and achievement is presently too insecure to be judged satisfactory.
- Standards and achievement in speaking and listening are satisfactory throughout the school.

- English makes a satisfactory contribution to the personal development and well-being of the pupils. They speak enthusiastically about trips to the theatre and reading clubs. In lessons, teachers take every opportunity to use literature to help pupils of all ages develop empathy for individuals and a knowledge of society.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- The decline in achievement at Key Stage 2 in 2007 shows that teaching and learning were inadequate. However, the lessons observed during the visit were satisfactory overall, showing that recent changes in policy are beginning to have an impact on achievement, particularly in reading. This was also evident in the pupils' written work in their exercise books.
- In the lessons observed during the visit, the pace was brisk and purposeful, questioning was challenging and teachers and support assistants provided appropriate support for groups and individuals. The lessons had clear objectives which were well understood by the pupils.
- Work in exercise books is marked satisfactorily. In the best cases, marking clearly points out what has been achieved and how the pupils could improve their work. However, there is some inconsistency between year groups, and the advice for the most and least able is not always sufficiently specific.
- The teaching of reading has improved throughout the school, following the implementation of new policies to focus on this area. However, the focus on reading has led to this aspect being taught in too isolated a fashion, without appropriate integration with writing. Writing needs similar attention in terms of teaching techniques and assessment.
- Opportunities for speaking and listening are good, leading to satisfactory standards and achievement in these areas.

Quality of curriculum

The curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- Recent changes provide a sufficiently broad and balanced curriculum to meet the needs of all learners.
- The curriculum in English is linked to other subjects so that pupils have appropriate opportunities to develop skills in literacy in other subjects.
- Pupils speak enthusiastically about recent changes to the arrangements for teaching reading, which are engaging their interest and enabling them to improve their skills of inference and deduction.
- The curriculum is enhanced by a range of trips, visits and opportunities for dramatic performance to which the pupils respond positively.

Leadership and management of English

The quality of the leadership and management of English is satisfactory.

- The school recognises the inadequacy of the results last year and has put in place strategies which are beginning to have a positive impact on achievement and standards.
- The subject coordinator has established a good range of monitoring activities and strategic planning for the future is well conceived.
- The school is working closely with the local authority to improve assessment arrangements and involve staff more closely in the tracking of individual pupils. This is beginning to have some impact on standards, particularly in reading. The subject coordinator has introduced these initiatives and changes to the curriculum well, so that staff have a sound understanding of them.

Independent learning in English

Independent learning in English is satisfactory.

- Pupils speak enthusiastically about their reading and appreciate the opportunities that they are given to choose and discuss their books.
- They are encouraged to participate in speaking and listening activities and respond well to the opportunities that this gives them to develop and express their own opinions
- They speak highly of their use of information and communications technology, saying that it helps them to make choices about styles and formats and to develop their ability to conduct their own research.

Inclusion

Inclusion in English is satisfactory.

- Results in 2007 show that the achievement of the pupils was inadequate at Key Stage 2. However, the quality of provision observed during the inspection demonstrates that all pupils are benefiting from recent improvements in the curriculum and in teaching and learning.
- Pupils with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well integrated in lessons. They receive a good level of support which enables them to access the curriculum. These pupils benefit from the support of teaching assistants in lessons and when they are withdrawn for individual help.
- Although marking is satisfactory overall, it does not always give sufficiently specific advice on how to improve work for the most and least able pupils.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising achievement in English
- ensuring that improvements in reading are matched by similar attention to standards and achievement in writing, and
- making sure that marking is consistent across year groups and provides all pupils with specific advice on how to improve their skills in English.

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. 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

Andrew Harrett
Her Majesty's Inspector