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Mr R Payne
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Payne

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 4-5 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 seven lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good and standards in English are above average.

- On entry to the school attainment is average. By the time that they leave, pupils' attainment is above average. Consequently, pupils make good progress.
- Since the last whole-school inspection, test results at the end of Year 6 have improved significantly. Current standards show that this improvement is set to continue because of the consistently good teaching.
- All pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve equally well.
- Pupils' standards in reading, speaking and listening are above average. In writing, standards are above average for all in Key Stage 3 and for girls in Key Stage 2. Boys' writing skills in Key Stage 2 are behind the girls'.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning in English is good.

- Teachers of English have agreed what constitutes good practice and they implement agreed strategies consistently well.
- Teaching seen was always at least good with one lesson being outstanding. Pupils spoke highly of their English teachers.
- Good lessons invariably start with a clearly set intended learning outcome followed by a quick mental warm up activity. Main tasks are sufficiently varied and differentiated to allow pupils of varying abilities to make good progress. Each lesson ends with an evaluative plenary.
- The one outstanding lesson was distinguished by allowing pupils opportunities to work independently to which they responded well.
- Assessment for learning is now well embedded in the department. Pupils understand what they need to do to improve their work further.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- The literacy strategy is well implemented. Lessons have a good balance between speaking, listening, reading and writing.
- The department has successfully focused on what teachers had agreed were weaker areas. For example, the focus on writing has allowed boys to catch up with girls in Key Stage 3 although they are still somewhat behind in Years 5 and 6.
- The department celebrates cultural diversity through literature. Pupils respond well to reading works from other cultures.
- There is a wide ranging and much appreciated enrichment programme.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management of English are good.

- The English department is well led by a committed and hard working subject leader. Consequently, there is a high level of agreement on what constitutes good practice and what needs to be done to improve.
- Monitoring and evaluation are effective. Outcomes are used to plan continuing professional development. Senior leaders are fully supportive of the department and of its work.
- The head of department and her colleagues have successfully analysed data and set individual pupil targets. These targets are regularly tracked and pupils are helped to understand what they need to do to improve their work further.

Independent learning in English

Provision for independent learning is satisfactory.

- Opportunities for independent learning include pupils choosing their own reading, taking part in enrichment activities and occasionally responding to challenging questioning by teachers.
- ICT is used regularly and pupils have opportunities to use it for doing some research.
- There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to work independently during lessons because there is a tendency for lessons to be too tightly structured. The English department recognises the need to increase such opportunities.

Inclusion

Inclusion in English is good.

- All pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve as well as each other.
- Although the gap between boys and girls has been significantly narrowed since the last inspection, boys' writing skills in Key Stage 2 are still behind those of the girls.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the quality of Key Stage 2 boys' writing, and
- increasing the opportunities given to pupils to learn independently.

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

Faysal Mikdadi
Additional Inspector