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Mrs C Staniland
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Staniland

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 05 March 2008 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 satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Standards in English are average and pupils' achievement is satisfactory.

- Standards have been consistently in line with national average at the end of Key Stage 2 over recent years. Most pupils reach level 4 but too few achieve level 5. Girls performed much better than boys in the national tests last year and the gap was greater than average. Your Pakistani pupils also achieved less well than Pakistani pupils nationally.
- The contextual value added data shows that achievement has been broadly satisfactory over the past three years. Pupils do better in English than in mathematics. The other performance data you shared with me confirmed under-achievement by able pupils. You have identified better progress by pupils in reading than writing.

- Progress in the lessons observed was good. Pupils behaved very well and were keen to learn. They responded enthusiastically to lively teaching. Many pupils speak clearly and confidently, and relate well to adults.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory; this reflects current levels of achievement by pupils.

- Pupils are broadly positive about English, although Year 6 pupils are aware of the impact of preparation for national tests and said that the focus on writing and revision reduced their enjoyment in lessons.
- The three lessons observed were good overall. Positive features included: good relationships with pupils; effective class management with high expectations of behaviour; effective use of speaking and listening activities; clear learning objectives and pupil outcomes; and use of some stimulating resources, including moving image texts.
- In these lessons, teachers did not always provide enough time for pupils to do independent work or to reflect on what they were doing and some opportunities were missed to model writing.
- Pupils show a good understanding of their targets for improvement in punctuation. The more able pupils were able to talk more widely about how to improve their work in English.
- The quality of marking was variable. The best was very detailed and provided good feedback against pupils' individual targets or the learning objectives for the lesson. Some marking provides too little feedback to pupils about their next steps in learning.

Quality of curriculum

The curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- The curriculum in English is broad and balanced, making good use of speaking and listening activities, reading and writing. Drama features strongly in some lessons and this motivates pupils well. The curriculum enables pupils to make satisfactory progress overall.
- You and your colleagues have clear ideas for further developing the curriculum in English by extending cross-curricular links, increasing pupils' enjoyment in lessons and improving provision for writing. This is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' learning.
- The curriculum is enhanced by a number of good enrichment activities. This includes the Big Writing Days, visits from writers and theatre groups and the Year 6 summer term reading group.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management are good in English.

- You have been able to re-structure staffing and now have a new subject leader in post, supported by other key teachers including the assistant headteacher and a lead professional for literacy. This provides a potentially strong team and, as a result, the capacity for improvement is good.
- There is a clear sense of direction in English. You and the new subject leader have identified well the key areas for improvement and there are many new initiatives in place to raise standards, especially in writing. Some of these have been introduced only very recently; consequently, it is too early to evaluate their impact on pupils' learning and test results.
- You have a very clear and systematic programme for monitoring and evaluating English. This includes detailed lesson observations, work and planning scrutiny, as well as feedback from pupils and teachers. The new subject leader is becoming increasingly involved in these activities.
- The subject leader has already led training for staff and keeps them well informed through regular updates. Teachers are regularly involved in moderating pupils' written work.
- The tracking of pupils' progress has improved and is now very thorough. This leads to regular reviews of progress with all teachers. The information is well used to target extra support for pupils, where needed.
- The subject action plan is not at present clear enough about overall aims and success criteria. In particular, it needs to show what the school is doing to raise the achievement of under-performing groups.

Independent learning in English

Independent learning in English is good.

- The school has put in place a number of good examples of independent work in literacy. This includes: the homework journal; the developing use of a learning journal for pupils; reading records that encourage pupils to reflect on their wider reading; good cross curricular opportunities for research, for instance the Guernica project in Year 6 and the Romans project in Year 3; and the initiative that gives some gifted and talented pupils opportunities for personalised learning.
- Drama and speaking and listening activities make a good contribution to pupils' development of independent learning in some lessons.

Inclusion

Inclusion in English is satisfactory.

- The school has created a good and inclusive climate for learning. Pupils work well together and participate equally in lessons.
- The school provides a good programme of additional support for struggling pupils. This includes external programmes such as ALS and FLS, as well as more recent school initiatives such as the use of reading volunteers. This programme builds well on the school's effective tracking of pupils' progress. The different programmes are also rigorously evaluated and the school acts on the results of these reviews.
- However, the results of tests show that some groups of pupils do not always achieve as highly as they should in English; this includes the more able pupils, boys, and pupils from ethnic minority groups.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving achievement in English, especially for identified groups such as boys, the more able pupils and pupils from ethnic minority groups
- extending the use of modelling by teachers to support writing and providing enough time for pupils to work independently in lessons
- improving subject action plans, with clearer identification of the impact of actions on pupils' achievement 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

Philip Jarrett HMI
Subject Adviser for English