

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs P Vernon
Headteacher
Osmotherley Primary School
School Lane
Osmotherley
Northallerton
North Yorkshire
DL6 3BW

Dear Mrs Vernon

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 03 November 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 included a focus on our current survey theme of creativity 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 two lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Standards in English are average and achievement is good.

- Children start in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) with varied levels of achievement in communication, language and literacy. They make satisfactory progress but early writing skills in particular are below the expected level by the end of the Reception Year.
- Standards achieved in tests at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 have generally improved and are slightly above average. This represents good progress overall by the pupils, including the significant minority who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Boys generally do as well as girls in English.

- Inspection evidence indicates that reading standards are higher than writing. Specific weaknesses in writing skills are being tackled across the age range, with some early signs of impact.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning in English is generally good.

- In the Key Stage 1 class, which includes pupils in the EYFS, reading and writing are taught effectively and children enjoy the engagingly active approaches used.
- Lively teaching and varied activities make lessons interesting and satisfying for older pupils, too. Teachers use imaginative approaches, such as using research into the world of the ancient Egyptians as a springboard for poetry writing, and sharing their own draft poems as models.
- Teachers' planning shows a good understanding of the wide range of needs in the two mixed age classes. Good relationships with adults are a strength, giving pupils the confidence to articulate their ideas and answer questions in whole class activities. Support is effectively deployed to ensure all pupils are involved and make progress with the carefully differentiated tasks. However, adults' skills in leading speaking and listening activities vary.
- Pupils have time to draft and review their independent writing, and teachers help them to improve it. Teachers accurately assess and regularly respond to written work. However, the explanation of expectations is sometimes insufficiently clear, succinct and engaging. Teachers are beginning to involve pupils in assessing their work, but do not always give pupils a clear enough understanding of what's expected of them.

Quality of curriculum

The English curriculum is good overall.

- Themes give the curriculum purpose and interest in the eyes of pupils. Careful evaluation of teachers' planning ensures the full breadth of English is provided for and there is an appropriately progressive level of challenge.
- Visits from creative practitioners, visits to local theatres and museums, joint events with local schools and pupil-written publications enrich the curriculum. The opportunities these give for using English skills are well exploited.
- The school is beginning to use information and communication technology (ICT) to reflect the way English is used in the 21st century, as illustrated by the pupils' animations, made with a visiting cartoonist. ICT is also being used to develop pupils' research skills and to prompt

them to use a wider vocabulary, and there are plans to make more use of its potential to stimulate and develop writing.

- Pupils say they enjoy lessons which use drama to explore texts and to stimulate writing.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management are good.

- You have worked closely with the previous and new subject leader to identify areas of underperformance by pupils. This has improved achievement over time, notably in reading, and the English action plan specifies carefully considered strategies to further improve outcomes in writing.
- Assessment is regular and rigorous, and the school responds swiftly to the messages which emerge. One result has been more time for speaking and listening activities. Pupils' enjoyment of these activities is very evident, and there are signs that they have encouraged boys in particular to strive towards higher expectations for writing.
- You have been able to offer some relevant professional development to all staff. This has had a positive effect on inclusion, as shown by the effective way in which adults meet the needs of the more vulnerable pupils. However, inspection evidence indicates some need to develop the confidence of adults in leading the activities designed to motivate and challenge young speakers and writers.
- The new subject leader offers a good role model and has a clear sense of direction, helped by the links you have with other schools. She has contributed to monitoring the curriculum and pupils' progress.

Creativity in English

- Thoughtful planning which links English with other subjects is helping the pupils to transfer their skills. Pupils are encouraged to think independently and to collaborate from an early age. They respond well to the chances they have to write in their own chosen way.
- Teachers' lesson planning aims to make learning exciting and relevant. Drama activities like role play and visualising, and purposeful discussions which give pupils significant responsibilities, have had a positive effect on engagement. However, the school has not evaluated their impact on the quality of learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- making sure teaching gives pupils a clear understanding of how to set about their work and do it well
- developing the confidence of adults to lead challenging speaking and listening activities.

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

Susan Bowles
Her Majesty's Inspector