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Mrs J Herd
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Herd

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 14 October 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 and pupils' work and observation of three lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Standards in English are below average. Achievement is satisfactory.

- Standards are low in English but with an improving trend due to increasing rates of progress. Unvalidated results in the national tests at Year 6 rose in 2008. Predictions for the present Year 6 are for a further rise. Overall, standards are higher in reading than they are in writing.
- Standards in communication, language and literacy are low in the Foundation Stage. Nevertheless, these children progress well and gain confidence in the use of language.
- Following a significant increase in standards in reading and writing at Year 2 in 2007, the unvalidated 2008 results returned to the lower levels of earlier years, partly due to substantial staff changes during

the course of the year. Predictions for the current Year 2 are for better results in 2009.

- Achievement is satisfactory overall. Many pupils achieve well, but rates of progress across year groups are not yet consistent. Almost without exception, pupils make faster progress in reading than they do in writing. The large number of pupils from Gypsy/Roma and Traveller backgrounds makes similar progress to other pupils and reaches standards above the national average for their group.
- English is popular with pupils. Their good attitudes are illustrated in their good behaviour and interest during lessons, even when the pace of teaching slows. These qualities make a good contribution to their learning.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- While never less than satisfactory, and often good, the quality of teaching is inconsistent.
- Pupils enjoy their lessons. They are engaged by good quality texts and exciting topics that appeal to both boys and girls. Drama and role play are now common features of English lessons, encouraging both staff and pupils to take risks. These features ensure challenge and fun.
- Increasingly, pupils have opportunities to share ideas within the whole group or with a partner in preparation for writing. However, these strategies are not yet fully embedded or wholly successful. For example, pupils are sometimes allowed to call out and talk over each other. In other lessons, pupils are moved on too quickly without enough opportunity to share and explore their ideas. Where lessons are overly directed by the class teacher, pace slows.
- Assessment is good. It is rigorous and extensive, with separate tracking for Gypsy/Roma and Traveller pupils to ensure that all have equal opportunities to learn and achieve. This data is closely analysed so that the school has a clear view of progress for individuals, groups and of the school's performance as a whole.
- Pupils feel happy with the support they receive and know their learning targets for English. They are regularly given pointers in written feedback on how they can improve their work.

Quality of curriculum

The curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- There are growing strengths in the enrichment and creativity of the curriculum, but some initiatives are not yet fully developed.
- The school is maintaining a good balance between increasing pupils' basic literacy skills while also stimulating and extending pupils' ideas and vocabulary. This approach is appropriate given the low levels of

skill and experience among pupils in this subject and the need to engage their interest, including those with challenging behaviour. Pupils particularly like the opportunities for drama in lessons, in the popular drama club and school productions.

- The school is currently working to develop links between English and other subjects. While history, in particular, is used well to give pupils additional opportunities to write, the potential of other subjects has not yet been fully exploited.
- Strategies for encouraging the discussion of ideas as a whole class or with a partner are not always used often enough or as effectively as they could be.
- Tightly focused planning provides essential small steps in learning. Assessment information is used well to identify those in need of additional support and a wide range of intervention strategies is in place to meet these needs.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management of English are good.

- You are giving strong direction and providing much support for improving provision and performance in English. You have high expectations and the focused use of assessment has led to higher and challenging targets. Increasing levels of progress and signs of improving standards illustrate the impact of work so far.
- In this work you are joined by the deputy headteacher and together you are successfully supporting the new subject leader so that she can operate independently. The new subject leader has already led staff training and worked closely with individual members of staff. This guidance has given teachers the confidence to adopt more imaginative strategies in their teaching and take creative risks in order to provide more interesting activities.
- The school is clear about what it needs to do to meet the needs of their particular pupils and this knowledge has prompted the emphasis on basic skills in combination with increasing pupils' engagement.
- You and your deputy are leading the way with monitoring teaching and learning, but lesson observation has also been undertaken by the new subject leader. You have taken responsibility for checking pupils' work, which you do weekly. At the same time, staff members have had training in work scrutiny so that these checks can be shared among others.

Creativity in English

- The school is actively seeking to extend imaginative and stimulating practices in English. This approach is proving successful but is not yet fully developed, particularly in all lessons.

- The English curriculum is enriched by book and poetry events, visiting theatre groups and story tellers, the drama club and regular productions.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- accelerating achievement in English, particularly in writing
- ensuring that all English lessons are consistently well taught and have enough opportunities for pupils to share and explore their ideas in preparation for their writing tasks
- extending the links made between English and other subjects.

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

Patricia Davies
Additional Inspector