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Miss Z Lundy
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Dear Miss Lundy

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 12 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 and pupils' work and the observation of two lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Standards in English are well above average. Achievement is outstanding.

- Outstanding achievement in English is fostered by a highly innovative curriculum, consistently good teaching at all key stages, rigorous assessment and pupils' extremely mature approach to their work.
- Attainment on entry to Reception has declined in the last two years, particularly in writing, and is now broadly average. These children make good progress, so that early language and literacy standards are above average overall when they enter Year 1.
- Standards are consistently high at Year 6, with increasing proportions reaching the higher Level 5 over the last four years. Pupils in Year 6 produce writing of considerable depth and sophistication. The performance of lower attaining pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is much influenced by the high quality

work of others and by the close support they receive in small groups. Consequently, these pupils achieve as highly as others.

- Accelerations in progress have raised standards in reading and writing at Year 2 from above to well above average levels in the last two years. Pupils in Year 2 are confident writers, with a good knowledge of basic skills and growing liveliness and richness in their choice of vocabulary. Assessments this term for the current Year 6 show that most pupils have made rapid progress during Key Stage 2.
- Improved progress is gradually narrowing the gap in performance between reading, which has been stronger historically, and writing. Most pupils are highly articulate. Throughout the school, pupils use subject vocabulary with ease and understanding.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- The impact of good teaching over time makes a significant contribution to pupils' exceptionally good achievement.
- Pupils enjoy English and work with considerable attention and interest. Exciting and powerful stimuli, often arising from first hand experience, enable pupils to explore their thoughts and feelings and generate many ideas. Staff work directly from pupils' contributions and use these as prompts to enrich the quality of language and written work.
- By Year 6, the school's focus on thinking skills is well established and pupils draw on this approach to get started on their work, even if they are sometimes not wholly clear about what they have to do. The impact of the approach, together with the many opportunities pupils have to write at length in a wide range of styles, ensures that they produce writing to a consistently high standard.
- Teaching is not yet outstanding because the potential of the school's highly creative curriculum is not always fully exploited during lessons. For example, the use of a special moment of understanding and wonder to explore ideas at a deeper level is sometimes missed, or the work of competent younger writers is constrained by too much structure.
- Assessment at all key stages is detailed, highly focused and carefully analysed. Pupils feel very well supported in their work. Learning targets are individualised and pupils know exactly what they are and what they mean. Written feedback always provides good quality comment on how pupils can improve their work. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are fully involved in drawing up their targets, which are written in language they use and, therefore, understand.

Quality of curriculum

The curriculum in English is outstanding.

- The curriculum offers a high level of challenge, stimulus and flexibility. These characteristics provide a wide range of imaginative teaching strategies and open-ended tasks which help pupils to make very good progress.
- Staff are quick to respond to spontaneous opportunities for developing pupils' understanding and skill. These occasions allow staff to use pupils' first hand experience as a stimulus for extending language and developing different types of writing, such as poetry. Current events, requests to write for local publications and the use of film clips in lessons, for example, all provide imaginative starting points that appeal to both boys and girls. The use of computer technology is strong as a teaching tool, for individual research and to present work in exciting ways.
- The school's emphasis on thinking skills is a powerful vehicle for promoting higher order literacy skills. It encourages a high level of reflection and discussion - sometimes about deep and complex issues - and a systematic approach to planning work. These skills are encouraged from Reception onwards and form a natural part of pupils' learning by the time they reach the top of the school.
- All aspects of English are equally promoted. Basic skills receive close attention and guided reading and writing are well established. Additional reading and spelling programmes provide focused support where needed and are popular with pupils. Texts are of a high quality and the new library is well resourced. Homework extends and supports lesson activities, alternating reading and writing tasks on a weekly basis.
- The introduction of one day 'learning events' brings English together with a range of subjects and these links now feature in everyday planning for many lessons.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management of English are outstanding.

- The development of English is pursued with considerable energy and passion. Expectations are high and all staff members share accountability for academic performance. They have willingly embraced the challenge of an imaginative and demanding curriculum and responded well to the spontaneity it encourages. Improvements to achievement and standards show the success of the school's work. The new subject leader has already completed a very thorough audit of provision and identified next steps.

- Scrupulous analysis of assessment information forms the bedrock of the school's self-review. As a result, leaders have an extremely clear view of the subject's strengths, shortcomings and key priorities. Whole school initiatives are now fine tuned to the more specific needs of key stages and year groups, driven by key stage leaders.
- Leaders undertake a wide range of monitoring strategies and now recognise the need to tighten checks on classroom practice to ensure that more recent initiatives are having a full impact.
- The governing body receives comprehensive information about the English provision and performance, which allows governors to monitor closely and provide financial backing where the school has identified the need for additional resources.

Creativity in English

- Senior staff have a clear view of creativity and are firmly committed to its promotion within English through an imaginative and responsive curriculum. Parents particularly like this approach. They are pleased with the subject's wide range of curriculum opportunities but express particular satisfaction with the maturity the English curriculum encourages within pupils.
- Additional activities include visiting writers and the specialist teaching of drama. Specialist teaching has extended the expertise of staff, who are now planning drama activities into lessons. 'Learning events' give children in Reception the chance to perform in front of an audience, developing confidence and self-esteem.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring the consistent use of innovative practices in all lessons in order to lift the teaching of English to an outstanding level.

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