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Ms S Benson
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Benson

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 09 February 2009 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 five lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Standards in English are below average but achievement is broadly satisfactory.

- Children enter the Foundation Stage with skills lower than is typical. They make satisfactory progress but their achievement is below expectations by the start of Year 1.
- Standards are below average at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2.
- Pupils' progress has been limited, but the school's tracking shows that it is steadily improving. Generally satisfactory progress was seen in lessons during the inspection, although pupils have a lot of catching up to do before their performance matches expectations.

- Pupils make better progress in reading than writing. However, few say they enjoy independent reading or using the school library.
- The school's focus on writing is showing signs of improving pupils' confidence about themselves as writers and the care with which they present their writing, though this is at an early stage.
- Boys have performed better than girls, which is unusual, but as a result of careful planning both boys and girls are currently making better progress and the gap is narrowing.
- Pupils enjoy their lessons and most try hard.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Teaching and learning are satisfactory in general and some good lessons were seen. Pupils speak well of teachers' efforts to help them and to engage them in learning through lively activities.
- There are good relationships between teachers and pupils.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, interesting shared experiences, with good adult involvement, have a positive effect on children's initially limited speaking and listening skills.
- Across the age range, teachers use a good variety of tasks and resources to meet students' different learning needs. In the best lessons seen, pupils worked in realistic contexts, made good use of talking partners and understood how to do good work.
- Weaknesses in the less effective lessons were missed opportunities to challenge pupils or to review learning effectively.
- Marking is constructive, but does not always follow up short term targets.

Quality of curriculum

The curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- After a thoughtful review, phased changes are being introduced to better engage the interests of the pupils. Though these have yet to have a clear impact on standards, they are having a positive effect on attitudes.
- New schemes developed by the staff are beginning to introduce and consolidate skills in meaningful and exciting contexts. Good use is made of creative partnerships, including with a local theatre and a visiting storyteller and artist. The response of pupils to the recent "Pirates" project was very appreciative, across the age range.
- A systematic approach to improving reading and writing skills includes a consistent focus on linking sounds and letters, which is gradually extending into Key Stage 2.
- Interventions are monitored closely. The Every Child a Reader programme is showing early signs of positive effect on accelerating

progress in reading and developing confidence in speaking and writing too.

- An emphasis on good handwriting and spelling is making its mark on pupils' writing habits.
- Information and communications technology is being used effectively to develop pupils' communication skills and understanding of different media.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management are good.

- Self-evaluation is accurate and the plans to make sure pupils catch up with national expectations are realistic as well as challenging.
- The vision for improving English is clear and imaginative. Staff are being supported well to try out more creative approaches together. New developments are systematically monitored and evaluated, with regular feedback to staff and a focus on what the next steps need to be.
- The senior leadership team is, with practical support from the local authority, giving the recently appointed subject leader good support.
- As a result, regular assessment is carefully managed to ensure consistency, and is being well used, for example to target interventions and to monitor their impact.
- Though standards remain below average they are now moving in the right direction. Pupils are enjoying the creative features of their lessons.

Creativity in English

Creativity is seen by the school as crucial to motivating pupils and so raising standards. Teachers are taking more risks, particularly through using drama to stimulate pupils to think and communicate. There is a stronger emphasis on creating a compelling context for communicating, whether by working with an artist and a storyteller or by writing letters, as young scientists, to help a manufacturer with a problem. Working with professionals in the theatre has stimulated strong interest in watching and making drama. Sharing full length books in class is, to judge by some older pupils' comments, engaging greater interest in authors and their work than in the past.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards and achievement in English
- encouraging more pupils to enjoy independent reading
- further developing pupils' confidence in themselves as writers.

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