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Miss M Murray  
Headteacher  
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Dear Miss Murray

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 26 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 six lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is outstanding and standards are high.

- Children's communication skills on entry to the nursery are better than is typical. They make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and this continues in Key Stage 1.
- By the end of Year 2, standards in reading and, especially, writing are significantly above average. By Year 6, standards are far above average.
- Both girls and boys make strong progress in all aspects of English, but more girls than boys reach the very highest levels for writing at both key stages.

- The school has taken effective steps to make sure that pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those learning English as an additional language, participate fully in lessons and make good progress.
- Pupils' independence and ability to communicate confidently, having been encouraged from an early age, are often impressive. They concentrate well and really enjoy the many creative opportunities they have.

## Quality of teaching and learning of English

Teaching and learning are outstanding.

- Strengths of teaching include the use of assessment to involve pupils in understanding how to do well. Teachers share simple success criteria with the youngest children, and, as they mature, approaches become increasingly sophisticated. Pupils refer to checklists for the particular activity to guide their individual or group work. By Year 6, pupils have a clear idea of what they are trying to achieve and can reflect on it meaningfully with their peers and their teacher. Pupils think this helps them to do better.
- The written feedback given to pupils is helpful and recognises specific achievements, although there is scope to give a clearer challenge to the most able.
- There is a strong emphasis on independent learning through challenging activities. Teachers' questioning prompts critical thinking, and there are high expectations for each pupil to contribute. Pupils are shown how to talk with partners in the nursery; in reception they are expected to offer individual and reasoned views in plenary discussion. Pupils with learning difficulties or those learning English as an additional language are supported well so that they too contribute to discussion. Overall, pupils showed great confidence in learning for themselves.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is well used to develop media literacy skills. Because pupils use computers regularly to research, make visual and audio visual presentations and even short films using green screen technology, they have good understanding of new forms of communication.

## Quality of curriculum

The curriculum is outstanding.

- Careful planning ensures good progression in key skills as well as a huge breadth of experiences for pupils.
- Nationally recommended approaches to teaching phonics are well embedded and have had a positive effect on some pupils' writing skills. Encouragement of wider independent reading is effective.

- The school uses a great variety of imaginative approaches to stimulate writing. The use of drama is spreading across the age range. Talk is used to prepare for writing and to help with editing. With good access to ICT, pupils draw on a wide range of media to research and communicate.
- Cross curricular themes are used to create realistic scenarios and writing purposes which inspire both boys and girls. They also promote awareness of cultural diversity and historical context.
- Enrichment and extension activities are plentiful and well targeted; some prompt pupils to stretch their communication skills, by working with a visiting Drama Specialist or by communicating with an unfamiliar audience. The school is investing in exciting opportunities to work with creative practitioners, something pupils are hugely enjoying. This is increasing teachers' confidence in trying out new and riskier approaches to learning.

### Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management are outstanding.

- Senior and middle leaders share an honest and rigorous approach to self evaluation and improvement. They are alert to any features which could be improved and assiduous and constructive in tackling them. Monitoring and evaluation are used well to make a difference. Pupils' views are clearly taken into account.
- As their effective drive to improve the attainment of boys and pupils learning English as an additional language shows, the school is committed to inclusion and diversity.
- There is a shared and clear sense of direction for English. Significant changes have been made to the curriculum, the deployment of staff and approaches to teaching and learning. Plans are well understood by the staff. They have been supported well by good partnership with the local authority and practical forms of professional development such as visits to see practice in a range of schools, peer observation and collaborative planning. These have fundamentally changed teachers' approaches, and made a very positive difference to pupils.
- The quality of provision has improved significantly and is now outstanding; standards have risen equally well and achievement is very good for both boys and girls. The school is far from complacent and has a very clear view of what it seeks to do still better.

### Creativity in English

Creativity is a key element in the school's planning for improving literacy skills and making learners more independent. The effects were evident when older pupils described a wide variety of activities which they feel have helped them learn specific communication skills. They have, for example, worked with a visiting storyteller to dramatise Greek myths, then made slideshows and short

films. They have performed a promenade version of 'Macbeth', writing extra script and taking on responsibility for conducting the audience around the locations for performance. When setting up business enterprises in groups, one challenge they recognised had been to negotiate with each other, and with adults in a local supermarket. They have learned about other cultures by working with visitors from other countries. One pupil was set a particularly challenging independent task to pass on some skills she had just learned herself to different age groups of pupils. From this she learned how to vary the content and tone of oral communication. Pupils felt these activities had been fun, but also useful, as they could see they had used the skills later.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

As the school has high ambitions and an accurate understanding of how to develop further, there are no areas for improvement.

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