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Mr J Myers
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Dear Mr Myers

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 31 March 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 and assessment information, pupils' work and the observation of four lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Standards in English are above average. Achievement is good.

- Pupils achieve well from an average attainment on entry into Year 3. National test results for English have been consistently above average at Year 6 and the school does well at Level 5, gaining significantly above average proportions at this higher level.
- 2008 results were a little lower than usual, but not significantly so, and represented a group with lower attainment than was normal for the school. In addition, one or two missed their predicted Level 5. Pupils in the current Year 6 are on track to meet their targets, signalling a return to the higher results of previous years.
- Performance in reading has tended to be better than writing but, as a result of the school's close focus on improving writing, pupils now progress equally well in both areas.

- However, there remains some variability in progress within and between year groups that the school continues to address. Whilst it is not always the case, the very small minority of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities tend to make relatively slower progress than other ability groups, although good support for some individual pupils during lessons develops their confidence and self-esteem. The school is well aware of this discrepancy and increasing the progress of these pupils is one of its current priorities.
- Pupils enjoy English a great deal, identifying writing among their favourite subjects. They are highly interested and motivated during lessons and apply themselves rapidly and enthusiastically to tasks. These personal qualities are important factors in their good progress.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Typical of lessons is pupils' considerable interest and enjoyment, generated by the topics, books and poems they are studying. They are keen to get on with their work, sometimes even making a start before the class teacher has quite finished speaking! They collaborate well and enjoy the chance to talk about ideas with others, recognising that two brains are better than one.
- Where teaching is most successful, practical activity, the visual stimulus of the computerised whiteboard and a pacy, lively style keep pupils alert and responsive. The use of 'real' resources – such as advertisements collected by the pupils – also promotes a buzz of enthusiastic hard work.
- Subject vocabulary is constantly emphasised, demonstrating high expectations and giving pupils precise language for their explanations. However, pupils' understanding of these terms is not always checked and reinforced. Consequently, some are not confident about what these expressions mean, or cannot explain how they relate to a particular example they have selected within a text.
- Written work is extensive and well presented, and more able pupils write to a high standard. There is some very occasional untidiness where expectations of presentation are not as high as they are in other classes.
- Assessment and academic guidance are good. Marking is substantial and rarely fails to give pupils guidance on how to improve each piece of work. There are high expectations of progress over the course of the year, although the means of recording movement is not yet sufficiently refined to show the smaller steps of progress achieved by lower attaining pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Quality of curriculum

The curriculum in English is good.

- Pupils benefit from thorough and detailed planning, with good levels of challenge in the curriculum's wide coverage of genre and considerable focus on higher order skills, such as analysis of text.
- Joint planning in year group teams allows staff to share expertise and ideas. This approach has also ensured parity and progression in lesson content for pupils in different classes within the same year group.
- The school is working hard to promote writing, and has sharpened its use of small group work to boost attainment. Strengths in reading are being maintained. The very new daily session of guided reading was praised by pupils, who noted that it gave them additional and welcome opportunities to read together and independently.
- The use of new national guidelines has brought a greater focus on speaking and listening and more imaginative activity to the curriculum. Pupils spoke appreciatively of the use of drama in some lessons and of the benefits of 'talk partners'. In some cases, pupils could point to these opportunities being used to promote better speaking and performance skills, although some quietly-spoken pupils are not always encouraged to speak up so that all can hear.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management of English are good.

- Senior management is keen to move on academic performance in English. Careful analysis of assessment information and the monitoring of lessons and pupils' work provide a clear and accurate view of provision and priorities for improvement. There is a constant determination to find ways to make things even better. These factors have been especially influential in sustaining above average standards and increasing pupils' achievement in writing.
- Subject leadership is able and enthusiastic. Although relatively new to the position, the subject leader already has a firm grasp of the strengths of the subject and what needs doing next. She is playing a valuable role in monitoring the subject's effectiveness, working with staff and delivering training, and has now started to visit lessons to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning.
- Strategic planning for English covers a wide range of well focused areas for development, although it is not always clear which are the most important and in what order they are to be tackled. In addition, success criteria are sometimes too generalised for the impact of actions to be fully measured.

Creativity in English

- The school is embracing innovation and creativity, but development is at a relatively early stage. Its 'Creativity Week' is a valuable starting point for demonstrating the effectiveness and popularity of this approach and has a strong literacy content.
- Cross-curricular links are growing and are strong in some year groups, most particularly in relation to history. The school is aware that there is scope for these links to expand and promote literacy skills further. For example, while there is some growing use of information and communication technology (ICT) for personal research, or to use video clips as stimuli, the school is not yet using the potential of this resource to the full. A similar picture is true of the use of multi-cultural themes and material representing different cultures from this country and other parts of the world.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increasing the progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- promoting literacy skills more widely across subjects, especially ICT and the study of other cultures.

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