

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs A Mann
Headteacher
Wadworth Primary School
Meadow Rise
Wadworth
Doncaster
South Yorkshire
DN11 9AP

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, analysis of pupils' work and observation of three lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be satisfactory and improving.

Achievement and standards

Standards in English are broadly average. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory.

- Pupils' attainment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is in line with national expectations for children of that age. Standards at the end of both Key Stages 1 and 2 have also been consistently in line with the national average results over recent years. This shows that achievement over time has been average.
- Although standards as measured by the national tests are broadly static at the end of Year 6, progress across Key Stage 2 has improved. Year 6 pupils who left the school in 2008 made particularly good progress and all moved on by at least two levels over this period.
- The school's own tracking data suggests that pupils are currently making good progress.
- There is no significant difference between the progress made by the various groups of pupils in the school. Boys do not reach standards in

writing that are as high as girls but the progress of boys overall in Year 6 last year was as good as girls. The school is seeking to improve the proportion of pupils who reach the higher levels in English.

- Evidence from the inspection, including lesson observations, work sampling and discussions with pupils confirmed that progress overall is satisfactory and improving.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning of English is satisfactory.

- Teaching overall is satisfactory and leads to broadly satisfactory achievement by pupils.
- There were good features to teaching in all lessons observed. Relationships with pupils were consistently good and teachers managed classes well. Lessons were well planned and this resulted in good and well managed support by Teaching Assistants (TAs) in the development phase of lessons. Good use was made of drama and group work to engage pupils. Pupils responded well and tried hard. At times, teachers gave pupils good opportunities to work independently and use their initiative.
- Lessons featured too many learning objectives or objectives that lacked precision. This meant that lessons lacked clarity at times in terms of the planned learning and this limited progress. At times, opportunities were missed to challenge higher attaining pupils sufficiently.
- Assessment in English is good. The quality of marking is mostly good. The best marking is extremely thorough and helps pupils to understand how to improve their work. Most marking is effective because it focuses on providing clear feedback on pupils' success in meeting the learning aims of lessons. As a result, most pupils understand how to improve their work in English, although not all are able to remember their curricular targets.

Quality of curriculum

The curriculum in English is satisfactory and improving.

- The school is currently developing its curriculum in order to increase boys' engagement, make learning more meaningful and improve the links between English and other subjects. The school has recognised that pupils have not always enjoyed lessons in English as much as it hoped. Although this work is in its early stages, there is already some evidence of a positive response to these changes, especially from older pupils. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact of these new approaches on standards and achievement.
- There are some innovative features to the English curriculum. The school is making effective use of good quality whole texts as a way of providing a context for pupils' writing and speaking. Reading is well

promoted through guided work and opportunities for individual reading, although there is scope to develop more discussion and writing around pupils' individual choices. There is also a need to integrate the library area and resources more fully into pupils' learning.

- The school has put in place a consistent approach to teaching writing. This is leading to greater opportunities for extended writing and helping pupils to understand how to improve their work.
- The curriculum is enhanced by themed weeks such as the Dahl week and the Africa week. There are also occasional visits for pupils to the theatre or visits by drama groups to the school. The move towards a thematic curriculum gives pupils more opportunities for direct experiences beyond school and these support their developing literacy skills. One of the TAs runs a story telling club which is proving popular with pupils.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management of English are good.

- The school has recognised the need to improve standards in writing, especially for boys. As a result, it has re-structured its approach to writing and target setting, and is finding activities that motivate pupils to write. The action plan for writing is effective in identifying a range of appropriate strategies although the plan lacks clear success criteria in terms of outcomes for pupils.
- There is a good sense of direction to work in English at the moment, through the combined efforts of the senior leadership team and the subject leader. They have clear ideas about English within the school; hence, the innovative curricular features identified above. The results of this good work can be seen in improved achievement in Year 6 last year. The capacity for further improvement is good.
- The school tracks pupils' performance effectively and uses this to identify when pupils are in danger of falling behind. It is setting challenging targets. Approaches to monitoring and evaluation are thorough, involving lesson observations, work sampling, reviews of planning, and, more recently, interviews with pupils.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving pupils' progress in lessons through clearer learning objectives
- extending the level of challenge for higher attaining pupils.

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

Philip Jarrett HMI
Subject Adviser for English