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Mrs M Cornwell
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Dear Mrs Cornwell

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 16 June 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 spelling and handwriting. 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 seven parts of lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Standards in English are broadly average. Achievement is good.

- Children progress well in the Nursery and Reception classes, so that standards rise from well below expected attainment on entry to below average levels when they join Year 1. The greatest progress is made in relation to phonic understanding. Children also benefit greatly from constant conversation with adults, which expands their spoken language and confidence to talk freely.
- The school has tightened up provision in Years 1 and 2, continuing the strong focus on phonics in the Nursery and Reception classes. As a result, standards at Year 2 have improved this year at the expected Level 2 and higher Level 3, bringing those in reading to a broadly average level for the first time. While standards in writing are higher than last year, they remain below average. Relatively slower progress in writing is due in part to insufficiently high

enough expectations of pupils' presentation and handwriting, which the school acknowledges and is working to address.

- Test results at Year 6 have been broadly average since the school opened. Highly focused teaching of the current Year 6 is ensuring their good progress over time and there is sometimes outstanding progress in lessons. This group, however, is a much smaller cohort than usual and contains a high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and or/disabilities. Given these factors, standards in this particular group are below average.
- Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those speaking English as an additional language make similar rates of progress to others.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Lessons are lively, engaging and well-paced, ensuring strong levels of interest and productivity from pupils. Work is well matched to pupils' abilities, although opportunities for in-depth discussion with the more able are occasionally missed during independent work.
- Focused preparation for written tasks, including the careful exploration of the characteristics of different types of writing, ensures pupils are thoroughly prepared in advance. Subject vocabulary is constantly promoted so that pupils use it readily and with understanding in their explanations. Dictionaries and thesauri are used routinely to expand vocabulary and aid spelling.
- In the very best lessons, levels of challenge are high for all. Questioning is skilful and teaching is greatly responsive to pupils' ideas, allowing the confident to excel, but also successfully encouraging the more hesitant to participate.
- Levels of participation from pupils during discussion are usually good. Sometimes, however, restlessness among pupils means that they are not all concentrating and miss key points. On other occasions, pupils are given too few opportunities to contribute to discussion and explore their ideas.
- Assessment is good. Progress is closely and regularly checked so that those in need of additional support are identified quickly. Work is marked regularly and pupils now consistently receive pointers for improvement. Targets helpfully outline what each pupil must do to reach the next level, and the school is now in the process of refining these further to reflect smaller steps within each level of attainment.

Quality of curriculum

The curriculum in English is good.

- Pupils benefit from the many opportunities to write at length in a wide range of styles. Drafting and editing are common features and there is thorough planning in advance of written tasks.
- The school is focusing closely on extending vocabulary and enhancing the liveliness of pupils' writing. It has readily adopted revised guidance and

planning, in order to provide more flexibility, imagination and a focus on speaking and listening skills relevant to the needs of its pupils. The flexibility of planning has given staff greater 'ownership' of the content of lessons. Selected texts are chosen for fun and interest and work is also enlivened by the use of drama. More able pupils, particularly at the top of the school, have a wide range of tastes in reading and talk enthusiastically about their favourite writers.

- Extremely effective use is made of specialist support from the local secondary school with more able pupils in Year 5 to promote the sophistication and confidence of their written work, enabling them to make excellent progress.
- Pupils' enjoyment of the written word is promoted well from the very start in the Nursery class, where children listen attentively to traditional stories. Involvement with the local theatre and the celebration of book events, such as World Book Day, enrich pupils' experience further and promote positive attitudes. The excitement of first hand experience – such as watching a batch of eggs hatch – provides much stimulation for writing at length.
- Cross-curricular links are in evidence, but not yet widely in use. Nevertheless, pupils benefit from opportunities to write often in other subjects, such as science.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management of English are good.

- Achievement in English has benefited a great deal from the school's wider work to create a common culture and approach since its opening and, in particular, to develop teaching and secure good behaviour from pupils.
- Subject leadership is strong. There is a clear and accurate understanding of the subject's strengths and weaknesses, gained through careful checks of planning and work. Expectations of progress are challenging, demanding at least good progress over each year. Senior leaders in particular track progress very closely and talk data through with individual teachers to ensure pupils are moved on as quickly as possible.
- The subject leader's additional responsibilities as coordinator for special educational needs mean that she looks closely at the outcomes for individual pupils and ensures intervention where pupils are falling behind. This role also gets her regularly into lessons so that she has a good grasp of teaching and learning. The school is aware that these visits should now be extended to focus on English too.

Spelling and handwriting

- Spelling is generally accurate, well supported by the school's focus on sounds and letters and the regular use of dictionaries and thesaurus'. This accuracy means that spelling in English does not often need correction. However, when there are mistakes, there is no common approach to correcting them. This inconsistency is particularly obvious in the marking of work in other subjects.

Importantly, mistakes in key subject vocabulary, in science for example, are not drawn to pupils' attention.

- By Year 2 most pupils are joining their letters. Nevertheless, handwriting at this stage is not always formed confidently and work is often untidy. Pupils make better progress in their handwriting skills across Years 3 to 4. As a result, handwriting is competent, individual in style, and often fluent by Years 5 and 6.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increasing expectations of pupils' written work in Years 1 and 2, in order to raise standards in writing.

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