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Dear Mr Tucker

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 04 June 2009 to look at work 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 parts of lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Standards in English are above average. Achievement is good.

- From broadly as expected attainment on entry to the Reception classes, pupils make good progress and reach above average standards in English by the time they leave for secondary school. Test results at Year 6 have been consistently above average, with data indicating increased progress over the last three years. The proportion gaining the higher Level 5 in the tests in 2008 was significantly above average.
- Children do well in the Reception classes, spurred on by exciting topics and considerable attention to developing their knowledge of sounds and letters. As a result, they enter Year 1 with above average standards in literacy skills, although outcomes are more variable from year to year at the higher end of achievement.
- The pattern of results at Year 2 is mostly of above average standards in reading and writing, but with an occasional dip to broadly average results. A

fall last year was most marked in writing. Consequently, writing, particularly at the higher Level 3, has been a key focus for the school's work this year. Underlying weaknesses in phonic knowledge and spelling are being tackled first to provide a firm foundation in spelling before moving on. This initiative is already proving successful. Standards in reading and writing are higher this year than they were last.

- Sharply focused language work within small groups enables lower attaining pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make good progress. During lessons observed, all groups of pupils made similar progress.
- English is popular with pupils and they talk with animation about the new arrangements for learning spellings. Such enjoyment makes an important contribution to their good progress in English.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Typically, pupils behave well during lessons and get on quickly with their tasks. They respond particularly well to activities that have an edge of competition – such as timed spelling challenges – and to those with a practical or imaginative content. Exciting themes in the Reception classes have been deliberately chosen to appeal to boys and ensure that they are keen to take part. For example, the current topic about pirates is proving to be very popular.
- Careful preparation for writing tasks is a key feature of teaching. Thorough research of the historical context and thoughtful discussion enabled pupils at Year 6, for instance, to slip swiftly into the life and feelings of a child chimney sweep in the Victorian era. As a result, they all produced powerful openings for a piece of imaginative writing.
- Variations occur, however, in pace and liveliness during lessons, and in the degree to which pupils participate actively in learning. There are sometimes missed opportunities, for example, for pupils to discuss work and ideas among themselves. Where this happens, progress is satisfactory, rather than good.
- Marking is well focused and encouraging. Spelling and punctuation are commented on and corrected and there are also chances for pupils to evaluate their work.
- Well organised systems for identifying pupils with particular difficulties ensure early intervention to get them back on track. Further improvements to assessment, including the use of learning targets, are at an early stage. Once implemented across the school, new approaches should provide much greater opportunities to check progress and analyse information, pinpoint weaknesses within year groups and track the progress of different groups of pupils, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Quality of curriculum

The curriculum in English is good.

- Good teaching is well supported by detailed and balanced planning using revised national guidance. Consistency of approach across key stages is ensured through team planning.
- Extensive opportunities for writing at length and for a wide range of purposes are key features of the curriculum. There are also valuable opportunities for pupils to edit and redraft. Pupils respond well, producing lively writing of a good length, neatly presented. In general there is a good level of challenge, although writing activities are not always adapted to meet the needs of different ability groups.
- Another strong element of the curriculum is the focus on spelling. Close attention to phonics in the Reception classes has been replicated in Years 1 to 2, while all pupils enjoy learning words for their 'tests' in school. Handwriting also receives specific attention in all year groups. Pupils in Year 2 learn to join their handwriting, but do not yet transfer this skill into their everyday work.
- There are valuable links made between English and other subjects, especially history. This provides pupils with an interesting stimulus for using their literacy skills and for researching information in books or on the computer. Pupils enjoy this cross-curricular approach. Formal productions by pupils during the year enhance the curriculum, as do cross-curricular arts events based, for example, on a particular painting.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management of English are good.

- Senior leaders provide clear direction for the development of English, both as part of whole school initiatives and within the subject itself. Developments to assessment and target setting, for example, are set to provide greater detail about achievement in English. Subject leaders are enthusiastic and their ready cooperation allows them to work together across the key stages. Good use has been made of expertise from the local authority and of training to extend expertise.
- Senior and subject leaders have an accurate understanding of the subject's strengths and shortcomings. Monitoring is developing well with dedicated time, varied sources of information and a timetable of activities. Subject leaders already have experience of evaluating initiatives, such as the introduction of the new national guidance, and of lesson observation and sharing their findings with staff.
- Consultation with pupils and parents has been particularly strong and useful in guiding initiatives, like the current focus on spelling. Further checks with parents to see how things were going showed an increase in parental satisfaction and led the school to refine its strategy further so that the selection of words is matched to ability.

- Development planning is well focused on improving standards and achievement and the school is working hard at its key priorities such as improving writing.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increasing pupils' performance in writing in Years 1 and 2, especially at the higher Level 3
- implementing the new assessment systems in all year groups in order to provide more frequent and detailed checks on the progress of individuals and groups of 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

Patricia Davies
Additional Inspector