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Mr J Wilkinson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Wilkinson

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 three lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

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

- Standards at the end of Key Stage 2 have risen consistently over the past three years to be in line with the national average. Results in 2008 were slightly above average but not significantly so. The school's detailed tracking data suggests that this upward trend will continue into the 2009 results.
- Given that standards on entry to the school are very low, this progress to standards at the end of Key Stage 2 that are slightly above average represents outstanding achievement. Despite very good work in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), many pupils still enter Key Stage

1 with standards in language and communication that are significantly below average.

- Assessments in the EYFS and at the end of Key Stage 1 show that there is a substantial gap between the attainment of boys and girls in English. This gap reduces across Key Stage 2. Indeed, boys performed better than girls in the 2008 tests. Over recent years, boys have achieved slightly better in English than girls; this is much better than the national trend. All groups of pupils achieve equally well including those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- Standards in reading are considerably higher than in writing across the school. Recent initiatives have led to improvements in writing but the gap remains significant at the end of Key Stage 2.
- English lessons make a very good contribution to pupils' personal development. Teachers provide regular opportunities for drama and discussion work and enable pupils to present their ideas to larger audiences, including within school assemblies. This helps pupils to gain in confidence and they work very well together.

### Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning of English is outstanding.

- Pupils enjoy English lessons. They explain that teachers make lessons lively and they especially like the opportunities given to them to choose topics for writing.
- Teaching was consistently very strong in the three lessons observed. Relationships with pupils were excellent. Teaching was confident and enthusiastic and pupils responded well. Pupils' learning was enhanced by active approaches including drama, role play, pair discussion and moving image work. A good level of support was offered by teaching assistants.
- Writing was taught well. Pupils were engaged by topics from other areas of the curriculum and elements of choice. Many younger pupils chose to write in the EYFS classroom, including within self-chosen play activities. Teachers provided helpful guidance for planning and classroom display was very effective in supporting aspects such as spelling and choice of punctuation. However, opportunities were sometimes missed by teachers to model planning for pupils.
- Pupils have a good understanding of the writing targets set for them and know what they need to do to improve their work. This is at least partly the result of consistently good marking that gives pupils a personal response to their work while also identifying their next steps.

## Quality of curriculum

The curriculum in English is outstanding.

- The curriculum in English enables pupils to make excellent progress while also enjoying lessons.
- Good quality planning ensures that literacy work, especially writing, is integrated into other areas of the curriculum. Pupils enjoy this approach and feel that it gives them much to write about.
- The reading curriculum is particularly strong, as reflected in pupils' positive attitude to reading and good results. The subject leaders have recently rewritten the reading policy. The new policy is comprehensive and provides pupils with a wide and well planned experience. This includes systematic phonic work, listening to children read, group reading, class novels, an emphasis on selected key authors, and time for individual reading. There are good links with parents and guidance on how to support reading at home.
- Although standards in writing are weaker, the school's approach is similarly thoughtful and well considered. The curriculum provides a good balance of opportunities for extended writing alongside systematic teaching of basic skills. Teachers provide pupils with choice over topics and/or forms for their writing and this also works well. Good practice was captured in the Year 5 lesson observed where pupils wrote well in a range of forms about the prophet Mohammed following lively media, drama and discussion work.
- The school organises a good range of enrichment activities that enhance pupils' literacy skills. This includes visits and trips that provide pupils with real contexts for their writing and speaking. In addition, there are regular visits to the school from writers and theatre groups.
- ICT is well used for word processing and research, for instance into the chosen authors. It is also being increasingly used to give pupils opportunities to make their own media texts.

## Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management of English are outstanding.

- The leadership of English is jointly managed by two subject leaders. The two subject leaders are both enthusiastic and committed. They have worked very hard and with some success to raise standards. The impact of their very good leadership is seen in a consistency of practice across the school in areas like teaching writing, the use of display in classrooms, and marking.
- The subject leaders, well supported by you, demonstrate an excellent sense of purpose to English work. They are reflective and analytical with strong views about the subject. This enables them to provide a distinctive and clear direction to subject work. They review external

recommendations thoroughly to see what will contribute to improved performance in the school and for your pupils.

- The subject leaders are both very good classroom practitioners, currently working in different areas of the school. They collaborate very closely and provide detailed guidance for colleagues. The joint leadership works very well.
- There is no complacency about the school's approach to English. You understand that standards can rise still further and appreciate that the challenge is to improve writing. The subject leaders continually review provision and have recently rewritten policies on both reading and handwriting. Subject plans are thorough and effective, based on detailed tracking of pupils' progress.
- Monitoring and evaluation are very secure. Termly reviews of each class are produced and use is made of "learning enquiries", lesson observations, work sampling and the views of pupils. Detailed feedback is given to individual teachers and trends are identified to support future improvement.

### Spelling and handwriting

Spelling and handwriting are taught systematically across the school. The school has produced a new handwriting policy that identifies the style to be taught, the action to be taken in each classroom and the time to be spent on handwriting. This contributes well to good standards of presentation in pupils' books. The approach to spelling is similarly well structured. A long term plan identifies the spelling to be covered across the school. Pupils have regular spelling tests, differentiated according to ability. As a result of this good provision, pupils are well aware of different rules and patterns in spelling.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving 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

Philip Jarrett HMI  
Subject Adviser for English