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Mrs Cocker  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Cocker

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 8 July 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 satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

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

- Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 have been broadly in line with the national average in recent years. The school succeeds in helping most pupils reach the expected standard in English at the end of Year 6. However, too few pupils achieve the higher levels in English at the end of either key stage.
- Provisional test results for 2009 suggest that standards remain broadly the same at the end of Key Stage 1 but with an improvement at the end of Key Stage 2. However, the school is aware that standards have not risen across Key Stage 2 in recent years in line with the national trend in results.

- Performance data show that achievement between Key Stages 1 and 2 has been slightly, but not significantly, above average over the past three years. Boys have achieved as well as girls over that period and this is better than the national picture. There is no significant difference between the progress made by the different groups in the school, including the small number of ethnic minority pupils. Low attaining pupils made good progress over this period as they moved through Key Stage 2.
- Assessment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage shows that most pupils are working in line with or above national expectations when they enter Year 1. This confirms the view of senior leaders that there is the capacity for higher standards in future at the end of Key Stage 2.

### Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning of English is satisfactory.

- Pupils enjoy English lessons, although this varies somewhat from class to class. They especially enjoy lessons that are active and give them opportunities to work together and learn for themselves.
- Relationships were good in the lessons observed and effective classroom management ensured that pupils behaved well and were positive about learning.
- Other effective features noted included: clear and specific learning objectives that provided direction to the lesson; good and varied support by Teaching Assistants; and opportunities for pupils to discuss ideas in pairs and small groups. Teachers also made good use of some interesting strategies such as music and pictures to support creative writing in Year 6, practical sorting tasks in Year 2, and the reading of an electronic book in the Reception class.
- At times, teachers planned too many activities and some of the activities did not contribute directly to progress with the learning objectives identified. There were also missed opportunities to emphasise broader writing issues such as context and audience alongside a focus on the so-called "secretarial" skills of grammar and punctuation.
- In discussion, there was a variable response from pupils when asked about their strengths and weaknesses in English. The Year 5 pupils were very clear in talking about their writing targets and how these are discussed and reviewed with teachers. The work sample suggested that there are some inconsistencies across the school in marking and setting curricular targets, particularly in the extent to which pupils are helped to understand what they need to do to improve their work.

## Quality of curriculum

The curriculum in English is satisfactory, with some good features.

- The curriculum in English follows the revised guidance of the National Primary Strategy. Longer term planning is thorough and secure across all year groups.
- Standards in reading are higher than writing and pupils speak enthusiastically about reading. This reflects at least partly a focus on reading for pleasure within daily "ERIC" sessions, supported by some systematic guided reading work and improved resources.
- The school has revised its approach to writing. This has been effective in providing regular extended writing tasks for all pupils that help to develop their stamina and concentration. There are also good developing opportunities for pupils to write at length in other areas of the curriculum. The Year 6 lesson observed was successful in helping some of the pupils write effective and imaginative short poems.
- Lessons are planned to ensure that pupils have opportunities to talk through their ideas before writing. Pupils say that they enjoy drama work in classes although provision for drama varies across the school. Pupils make use of information and communication technology to write, research and support oral presentations. Although there has been some use of moving image texts, this is limited at present especially in the opportunities for pupils to create their own such texts.
- Enrichment activities enhance the English curriculum well. This includes visits to the theatre, occasional visits by writers and others to work in the school, Book Fairs and Book Weeks, and an occasional school newspaper. All classes are involved in annual productions and "Grease" was in full swing during my visit.

## Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management of English are satisfactory, with some good features.

- The school's self-evaluation in English is good, based on a realistic appraisal of provision, acknowledging that standards should be higher and setting high expectations for pupils' performance in English.
- The school's leadership has carried out a rigorous review of teaching over the past year. This identified some variability in the quality of teaching. The school is very clear about the ways in which teaching and learning can be strengthened.
- The school has recognised that standards in writing have been weaker than reading and has made this a priority in the past two years. This has led to an emphasis on providing pupils with more opportunities for extended writing and using talk to prepare for writing. These changes appear to have contributed to improved standards in writing in the current Year 6 group.

- The subject leader has identified a clear programme of English activities across the year, including training events, reviews of policy and opportunities to moderate pupils' work. This contributes well to the annual subject action plan.
- The progress made by pupils is increasingly tracked in detail and reviewed closely across all classes. Under-performance by pupils leads to additional support, making use of a range of different intervention programmes provided.

### Spelling and handwriting

The literacy policy provides clear guidance on spelling and handwriting. Most pupils get regular handwriting practice, following the broad guidelines laid down for teachers in the policy. Standards of handwriting are good. Spelling is taught through the "Letters and Sounds" programme for younger pupils. Most older pupils are given differentiated spelling lists to learn, which are tested weekly. These are based on common patterns and rules. Pupils find this helpful although they do not recognise that much explicit teaching of spelling goes on to support these tests. Marking rarely includes any systematic correction of pupils' mistakes or follow-up by pupils although the new marking policy should improve practice.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the achievement in English of the higher attaining pupils
- providing more opportunities for pupils to write for a wide range of audiences, purposes and contexts.

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