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22 September 2009

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Dear Miss Jakeman

Ofsted survey inspection programme - English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 16 September 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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half term.

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 is satisfactory.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is satisfactory.

- Children enter the Foundation Stage with standards that are well below national expectations in communication, language and literacy. They make satisfactory progress from their low starting points, particularly in reading and speaking and listening. However, they do not all make similar progress in their writing.

- Standards in Years 1 and 2 are below average. They were particularly low in 2008, especially in writing. However, clear evaluation of the problems that led to this dip and swift intervention ensured that in 2009 standards improved and progress was satisfactory.
- Until recently, standards at the end of Year 6 were persistently below the national average, although pupils' progress improved during the same period. Good teaching and focused intervention in Year 6 ensured that standards rose in 2009 in both reading and writing. They were in line with the national average and the pupils' progress improved and was more securely satisfactory.
- Current standards and progress across the school reflect the school's own evaluation. Standards are below average. Although progress is improving over time, there is some inconsistency between year groups.
- All groups of pupils make satisfactory progress. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is satisfactory and improving because of the successful strategies to support them in lessons and the programme of intervention which responds well to their individual needs.
- Pupils say that they enjoy English. They enjoy writing imaginatively and talk about their reading enthusiastically.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory.

- Some good teaching was observed during the visit but it was insufficiently consistent to raise achievement across the school to above a satisfactory level.
- In the best practice, the purpose of lessons is clear to the pupils. A range of activities is carefully chosen to engage the pupils' interest and to enable them to make good progress.
- Teachers use imaginative approaches to which the pupils respond well, such as acting in the role of a character from a novel, followed by careful questioning of the pupils to enable them to explore the character's possible reactions to dilemmas in the story.
- Teaching assistants provide good targeted support to enable pupils to participate in the lessons. Good support for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities in lessons and through extra help ensures that they make satisfactory progress.
- Work is carefully chosen to match the ability and needs of pupils when they are working in groups. In the very best practice, help is available which does not merely give pupils the answers that they are seeking, but stretches them to take their knowledge further.
- Some lessons lack pace and urgency because the learning objectives are too vague and the point of activities is not clear to the pupils. Occasionally, some pupils lose interest in their work because they are in groups which are not receiving targeted support from the class teacher or the teaching assistants. Left too much to their own

devices, with inadequate support and direction, their rate of learning quickly deteriorates.

- Pupils have a good knowledge of their targets and are able to discuss them with a clear sense of what they need to do to improve their work.
- Individual support in lessons enables pupils to understand what they have achieved and how to improve their work. However, although exercise books are marked regularly, the quality of written comments and advice varies across the school.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- The curriculum provides pupils with their full entitlement. It meets the needs of different groups of pupils through good intervention and catch-up programmes and attention to individual needs.
- Recent curriculum initiatives have been reviewed and show that those classes which were involved in them, such as Year 6, made better progress in their writing.
- Improving literacy has been the starting point for developing cross-curricular work. This has led to popular projects which have had a positive impact on achievement. The school has worked closely with another similar school in the locality to develop its curriculum and has also worked in partnership with other schools in the town to develop projects across schools.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are satisfactory.

- You have taken responsibility for leading the improvement of standards and achievement in English and you now have a subject leader who is taking an increasingly important role in evaluating the quality of teaching and planning.
- The school has created good systems for monitoring the progress made by pupils which are having a positive impact on achievement in the subject. There is now a common understanding of standards in the school and assessment is more accurate and rigorous.
- Initiatives such as the whole-school moderation of writing have enabled staff to understand what the pupils have achieved and what they need to do to improve their work. This has raised staff expectations and ambition so that there is a more focused determination to raise standards in English.
- A clearer understanding of the needs of the pupils has been matched by more rigorous strategic planning.
- Good leadership of the provision for those pupils with learning needs ensures that they make satisfactory progress in their learning.
- Although there have been improvements in teaching, there are still inconsistencies. However, the improvements in achievement over

recent years and the raising of standards in the National Curriculum tests in 2009 show that the capacity to tackle this is good.

Spelling and handwriting

- The school has a well-established programme of handwriting practice in short, regular sessions. Pupils respond well to this and their general standard of presentation is good.
- Handwriting practice is linked to the pupils' spelling. However, the school rightly thinks that the programme should ensure a closer link between handwriting and the work that pupils do in exercise books across the curriculum.
- Spelling is corrected regularly in pupils' exercise books. The school has recently considered how to improve its practice further in this area and is introducing a programme which encourages pupils to understand spelling rules and develop strategies for finding the correct spelling of words. Pupils discussed these strategies well during the visit.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the overall quality of teaching by ensuring that lessons have more pace, variety and challenge across the school, matching the best practice in the school
- improving the quality of marking in exercise books.

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 and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be made available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Harrett
Her Majesty's Inspector