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Dear Mr James

Ofsted survey inspection programme – English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 5 October 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 included interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is outstanding.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is outstanding.

- Attainment is well above national averages and continuing to improve. Confirmed results for 2006 to 2008 show a sustained upward trend. Provisional results for 2009 maintain this pattern.
- Pupils enter Reception with communication and language skills below national expectations and by Year 6 have achieved standards significantly higher than average. Provisional results indicate that, in 2009, over 75% attained Level 5 in reading. This represents outstanding progress.

- Girls have been outperforming boys in Key Stage 1, especially in reading at the higher levels. This has triggered a programme of support for boys' reading and comprehension at the start of Key Stage 2. The school's detailed monitoring of progress shows that this is having a positive impact. By Year 6, boys and girls attain very similar levels.
- Well-directed support for pupils who have difficulties with reading has successfully narrowed the gap between them and others but, as the school acknowledges, achieving the same for their writing skills remains a challenge. Concentrated support in school is complemented effectively by specialist input from external agencies. Overall, these pupils progress as well as their contemporaries.
- The number of pupils who speak English as an additional language is steadily increasing. With extra support as needed, these pupils quickly settle into the school and progress as well as others.
- Pupils are enthusiastic about English: 'It's fun!' They know their current level of attainment and what they need to do to reach the next. Their literacy skills, their confident use of information and communication technology and the fluency with which they present and defend a point of view equip them well for the future. Older pupils enjoy helping younger pupils with reading.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is outstanding.

- The very good progress made by pupils reflects teaching that is outstanding overall. Teaching observed during the inspection was consistently good.
- Among the strengths were teachers' secure subject knowledge, the quality of lesson planning, time management, pace and the effective use of questions to ensure that pupils were secure about what had been covered and ready to move on. The marking of written work balanced praise with specific points for improvement. The rapport between teachers and pupils was positive and productive.
- In some lessons observed, teachers were too quick to offer answers to questions they had posed. Although pupils defined good teaching as 'making them listen', where the lessons were strongly teacher-led, it limited pupils' opportunities to develop as independent learners. When pupils were working in pairs or small groups, it was possible for one or two to dominate so that not all were actively involved.
- Pupils happily presented their work to the class and feedback was invited, but most often it was the teacher who evaluated pupils' contributions, so opportunities for others to develop as constructive critics were missed.
- Pupils have well-founded confidence in their teachers, trusting them to set appropriate targets and explain how to achieve them.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The curriculum in English is good.

- Schemes of work succinctly outline National Curriculum requirements for each stage and map progress through them, term by term. Each unit of work focuses on a specific genre or skill, with clearly set out objectives. There is clear progression. A Year 6 pupil observed: 'Every year we do the same kind of thing, but it gets harder.'
- Schemes for Years 5 and 6 highlight literature and a range of media. Older pupils spoke enthusiastically about opportunities to be inventive in their writing. Schemes of work for younger pupils do not show such a wide choice of resources or a focus on creative learning.
- Teaching groups from Key Stage 1 upwards are organised well according to ability. Collaborative lesson planning ensures that all groups cover similar themes and aspects of language, although in different ways.
- The clarity and structure of the curriculum ensure that pupils are well prepared for National Curriculum assessments, as their impressive results demonstrate.
- An exceptionally well-stocked library, with an excellent range of world literature, and events such as Book Week and visits from writers, complement the mainstream teaching. Pupils rightly value these.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are outstanding.

- Your high expectations set the agenda for the subject team's very effective management. Carefully organised systems to drive achievement, such as setting by ability, are rigorously monitored by the deputy headteacher and the subject leader.
- Regular reviews of standards and progress determine the targets for groups and for individuals, with prompt and effective intervention when there is evidence of underachievement or loss of pace.
- Medium- and short-term planning set out ambitious but manageable objectives, strongly supporting the school's overall development plans.
- The positive impact of initiatives to raise attainment overall and to meet the specific needs of individual pupils demonstrates the department's outstanding capacity for continuing improvement.

Spelling and handwriting

- Word structure and spelling are included in every scheme of work. There is systematic teaching of phonics in the Reception class and across Key Stage 1. From Year 1 onwards, word lists and weekly spelling tests ensure that pupils take spelling seriously and do improve. In Year 6, there is an

emphasis on proof-reading and editing of work to promote technical accuracy.

- The school has a distinctive approach to handwriting. From the very beginning, pupils are taught to develop a joined-up script. Those who struggle with this are helped by exercises to develop manual dexterity and to speed up their writing. There is targeted intervention for Year 6 pupils who have developed bad habits or need to develop greater speed to succeed in timed assessments.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- managing group work to ensure that all pupils are actively involved
- extending opportunities for pupils to evaluate each other's work.

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 available to the team for the next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector