

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs D Harber
Headteacher
Southgate Primary
Barrington Road
Southgate
Crawley
RH10 6DG

Dear Mrs Harber

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 7 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is satisfactory but improving.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is satisfactory.

- Levels of attainment in English over recent years have been broadly in line with the national average. Provisional results for 2009 appear to be substantially better than in 2008.
- Girls outperform boys both in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. The school is developing an approach targeted particularly at boys, and in-school assessments indicate that this is having a positive impact.
- Most pupils enter the Reception class with communication and language skills below national expectations. Their quality of learning is often

inhibited by poor concentration and lower levels of maturity than normally expected. Good progress enables these pupils to attain broadly average standards at the end of Key Stage 1.

- Progress at Key Stage 2, as measured by contextual value-added data, shows that progress in English has been poor historically. However, the unvalidated results for 2009 indicate that progress has much improved. Overall, pupils' progress in English is satisfactory although some pupils do better than that.
- Pupils are willing but not independent learners. Their progress is determined by adults' expectations and these are not yet consistently high enough to drive sustained improvement, especially for the more able.
- Numbers joining with English as an additional language have increased sharply. Thorough immersion in the mainstream curriculum, complemented by targeted support from trained teaching assistants, enables these pupils to progress as well as other groups.
- Those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities clearly benefit from well-directed support in class and periodic withdrawal for small group teaching. They progress at a similar rate to their contemporaries.
- Year 6 pupils make a positive contribution to the school's English provision by selecting library books which they read to Reception class children.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory.

- Among the strengths observed were secure subject knowledge and enthusiasm, thoughtful planning, good time-management and a positive rapport with pupils. Teachers demonstrated good questioning skills. When the hoped-for response was slow, however, they too often provided the answers themselves. There were examples of good practice, with quick-fire question and answer sessions successfully consolidating a class's understanding and giving a sense of progress.
- In all the classes observed, pupils were encouraged to present their work to others. While this occasionally led to constructive discussion, evaluation of work generally came from the teacher and so opportunities for pupils to develop critical skills were limited. The potential for more able pupils to take a lead was not often exploited.
- Pupils responded well to group and pair work, although they found it hard to remain focused. Too often, dominance by one or two pupils limited the contribution made by others.
- Teaching assistants make a significant contribution to pupils' progress, mainly through targeted support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Marking of written work is good, with praise balanced by clear and manageable guidance on how to improve.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The curriculum in English is good

- The curriculum has recently been reviewed and revised to support pupils' patterns of learning more closely, especially of those who, in the past, have been relatively slow readers and writers. With a clear framework and objectives for each task, the curriculum gives pupils confidence and a sense of direction.
- Schemes of work for all year groups closely follow National Curriculum guidelines, but with little evidence of original approaches to learning. Individual lesson plans present more creative opportunities through a themed, cross-curricular programme. Good examples were observed of presentation skills developed through geography, history and science topics. Themes such as 'Super Heroes' are particularly successful in capturing boys' interest.
- Enthusiasm for reading has been greatly increased by the 'Bookworm' programme, with pupils keen to win rewards by working through a recommended reading list.
- Events such as Book Week, visits from writers and school plays complement the main curriculum. There are plans to increase the range and involvement of the library but these are not yet embedded.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are good.

- The school is going through a process of review and revision after a period of instability, with raising attainment as a key priority. Strongly supported by the senior leaders, the subject leader is establishing a secure curriculum framework and clear guidelines for teaching and assessment. Morale is buoyant.
- Strong and effective leadership at a senior level has led to improved standards in English over the past year although the school acknowledges that achievement is not yet as high as it would like.
- Detailed information about standards and progress is now being well used to shape planning and track progress. The immediate impact of these initiatives is visible in the 2009 improved Key Stage 2 results.
- The schools' capacity for further improvement is good.
- Termly reviews identify underachievement and trigger well-directed interventions but expectations for groups and individual pupils are not always sufficiently challenging.
- Developing an enquiry-based curriculum is an agreed priority but progress towards that is still in the early stages.

Spelling and handwriting

- Word structure and spelling are included in all schemes of work. Pupils regularly have spellings to learn for homework, reinforced by testing. Teachers generally correct misspellings in written work. There is systematic teaching of phonics in the Reception class and across Key Stage 1.
- The school follows an orthodox handwriting programme, with pupils progressing from printing to a joined-up script through Key Stage 1. Handwriting practice continues into Key Stage 2 and is enjoyed by many pupils. The presentation of written work by the end of Key Stage 2 is variable.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the proportion of good and outstanding teaching by:
 - ensuring that expectations are consistently high enough to challenge as well as engage pupils of all abilities, in both oral and written work
 - 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 at the end of each half-term. It will also be made available to the team for the next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector