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Mr G Storch
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Dear Mr Storch

Ofsted survey inspection programme – English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 12 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 good.

Achievement in English

Pupils' achievement is good.

- Standards on entry to the school are above expectations.
- Results for Year 6 pupils have been consistently above average. Over time, nearly all pupils reach the expected level. A broadly average proportion reaches level 5. This represents generally good progress.
- Pupils reach very high standards in reading, but more average standards in writing. The gap is wider than found nationally, and has persisted in the unconfirmed results for 2009.

- Boys perform at least as well as girls in reading across the age range, but their progress in writing is less consistent.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well, and there are no substantial differences in achievement between groups of pupils in the school.
- Both boys and girls enjoy English. They are absorbed during independent reading time and keen to get involved in group activities, although their interest wavers if they have to listen too long to the teacher. The standard of written work seen was generally good, although there is scope to improve the quality of spelling.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching is good.

- Pupils enjoy English lessons, especially where learning is active. They are enthusiastic about reading. Some would like more opportunities to make significant choices about their writing.
- There is a strong core of good and outstanding teaching in English that illustrates good practice. However, there is some variability in quality across the school which limits the achievement of pupils.
- In lessons observed, relationships with pupils were consistently good. Lessons were mostly planned well, lively and varied. Teachers used good resources well. They modelled reading and writing helpfully on interactive whiteboards and made good use of hands-on learning and role-play to develop speaking and listening skills. They provided helpful guidance for independent work but left space for individual ideas. Good teamwork with teaching assistants ensured every pupil participated in activities as fully as possible.
- In the less effective lessons observed, planning was less clear about how the intended learning would happen. This sometimes led to teachers spending too long on explaining and pupils' attention faltered.
- Older pupils understand their targets and how they are making progress. Teachers assess well through questioning. When marking or giving feedback, they highlight achievements and areas to improve, and sometimes involve the pupils in self- and peer-assessment.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The curriculum is outstanding.

- The curriculum has very successfully fostered pupils' love of books through daily time for independent reading, a good choice of books, and the enthusiastic support of adults.
- Teachers often use a shared book to give a meaningful context for practising new skills. Role-play is used to help pupils explore texts and prepare for writing.

- Pupils say that lessons increasingly reflect their interests. Teachers plan individual and inventive approaches to schemes of work, sometimes involving the pupils. Pupils have responded well when invited to choose the style or content of their work, as Year 4's long stories illustrated.
- Teachers have devised practical and realistic opportunities for pupils to use new speaking and writing skills. Year 5 pupils, for example, learned much through preparing questions and recording radio interviews. Literacy skills are practised in other subjects. Pupils write for wider audiences through the parish magazine and the website.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The leadership and management of English are good.

- There is a clear direction for the subject. Strategies to encourage independent reading have had an excellent effect.
- Information about pupils' performance is analysed carefully to identify any need for intervention or areas for development.
- Interventions are carefully monitored and evaluated.
- Teachers have worked well as a team to make the curriculum more interesting and effective. They benefit from opportunities to plan and teach together.
- Plans to improve pupils' writing are well understood by staff, though not yet applied consistently well.

Spelling and handwriting

Teachers have clear guidance about how handwriting is to be taught across the age range. This has been applied with good effect, so that, for example, individuals with poor handwriting have shown decided improvement. Guidance on spelling is less specific and has had a less consistent effect.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising standards in writing, by
 - creating more opportunities for independent writing
 - involving pupils more effectively in improving their writing
 - improving pupils' accuracy in spelling.

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 your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Susan Bowles
Her Majesty's Inspector