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Mr P Mullins
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Mullins

Ofsted survey inspection programme – English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 14 October 2009 to look at work in English. As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of English, the visit had a particular focus on the teaching 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 four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is good.

- Pupils' attainment over the last three years was broadly average but provisional results for Year 6 in 2009 have improved to be well above average. Results for Year 2 pupils also improved to be above average in 2009.
- Previously, pupils performed better in reading than in writing but the 2009 results show a marked improvement in writing to equal reading.

- Pupils make good progress, as the 2009 provisional results and the school's own assessment data demonstrate. They also made good progress in the lessons seen during this visit.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress generally, as do those who are gifted and talented. Boys make similar progress to girls overall.
- In the lessons seen, pupils settled to work with enthusiasm and showed interest in the themes on which their work is based. They tried hard and worked together well.

Quality of teaching in English

Teaching in English is good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons with clear objectives. They use a good range of activities to engage pupils' interest and ensure that learning moves at pace. Relationships are very good and pupils respond well.
- Teachers generally match work to pupils' needs and attainment, although this is often through adult support and guided group work rather than by different levels of task or variation of resources.
- Teachers provide clear examples for pupils of how to structure and compose their writing. They use technology well to demonstrate skills. They question pupils to check their understanding and some routinely challenge pupils to explain and justify their answers, though this is not yet consistent across classes.
- Pupils know their targets and use the success criteria for their work effectively to assess their progress.
- Teachers' marking is regular and relates to the learning objectives. The best marking makes clear how pupils can improve their work but this is not yet consistent across all classes.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The curriculum is good.

- Pupils enjoy English and the themes by which work is organised. They value the 'inspiration days' and the associated events and trips.
- The school has developed a well-considered thematic approach to the curriculum which ensures that literacy skills are taught discretely but enables them to be applied through the major themes which link subjects together. Pupils enjoy the range of writing and other activities, and the sense of purpose created by working towards a final presentation, often involving parents as an audience. They use computers regularly as part of their learning in English.
- There is a very good range of additional events and activities which enhance pupils' learning in English. There are regular visits by authors and

the school's radio station allows pupils to demonstrate speaking and listening skills in a real context. Events and competitions promote pupils' independent reading.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management are good.

- Senior staff and the subject leader have a very clear vision for English, firmly based on raising achievement. They have taken clear action over the last three years to improve writing and engage boys' interest, and this has resulted in improved performance in 2009.
- The subject leader has a detailed development plan with relevant priorities derived from accurate analysis of strengths and weaknesses in English. However, the criteria to judge success are not always measurable.
- The senior staff set clear expectations for teaching, based on common approaches. Teaching has improved and pupils now make good progress.
- The subject leader conducts a good range of monitoring activities and evaluates provision to identify priorities for action. There is good use of training and visits by teachers to other schools to see best practice.

Subject issue: the teaching of spelling and handwriting

- Teachers understand the importance of teaching spelling and handwriting. There are good examples of teachers identifying specific issues in pupils' work, such as incorrect letter formation or confusion over spelling rules. These are commented upon and advice given for improvement.
- Most classes have a spelling programme but these currently vary across the school with different teachers using different methods. The handwriting programme is consistent and leads to pupils gaining a 'pen license', usually by the end of Year 4.
- The school intends to use the recent national guidance on teaching spelling as a focus for increased consistency.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- further improving the consistency of teaching by ensuring that all teachers:
 - plan activities that match pupils' needs through tasks and resources at different levels
 - use probing questions to challenge pupils to explain and justify their ideas
 - provide comments in their marking which help pupils to understand how to improve their work
- improving the focus of evaluation by setting measurable success criteria linked to the subject development plan so that the impact of the actions taken may be analysed.

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

Martin Cragg
Her Majesty's Inspector