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19 November 2009

Mr W Aylett
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Dear Mr Aylett

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 4 November 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 satisfactory.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is satisfactory.

- Pupils' attainment is broadly average by the end of Year 6. Attainment in writing has improved steadily, but attainment in reading has declined recently at the higher Level 5.
- Pupils make satisfactory progress between entering Year 3 and leaving Year 6. The school's analysis of its assessment data indicates that progress is satisfactory overall, but good in some year groups.

- Girls perform relatively less well in writing compared with the national average but boys perform less well in reading. The school is aware of these areas for development and is acting upon them.
- Those pupils who speak English as an additional language make similar progress to their peers, as do pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- In the lessons seen, most pupils made good progress. They settled to work quickly, approached tasks with enthusiasm and collaborated well. Most are willing to participate in class discussion and share their ideas but a few do not listen carefully enough to learn from each other.

Quality of teaching in English

Teaching in English is good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons thoroughly, increasingly using their assessment of pupils' understanding to adjust objectives so that learning is well-focused. Progress in lessons is good, but this is yet to raise attainment in national tests at the end of Year 6.
- Teachers use a good variety of activities to interest pupils, including regular pair and group work. There is an appropriate balance of talking and writing. Teachers and teaching assistants support pupils effectively in guided group work.
- In the better lessons, teachers use challenging questions to encourage pupils to explain and justify their ideas, but this is not yet consistent across all lessons.
- Teachers' marking is thorough and usually provides clear advice to pupils on how to improve their work. Pupils know their targets. They are familiar with the checklists, which they use effectively to ensure they have applied the key features of tasks and to review their work.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The curriculum is satisfactory with some good features.

- Pupils mostly enjoy English, particularly drama and opportunities to write creatively. They like applying their literacy skills through work in the themes which draw a range of subjects together.
- Literacy skills are planned effectively into these themes. The quality of writing undertaken here is often better than that in the regular writing practice in literacy lessons because pupils are more confident and secure with the information they use.
- The curriculum is suitably broad with a good focus on speaking and drama, and increasing emphasis on teaching reading skills in guided group work. Although there is a broad range of writing forms, aspects of media and the use of modern communication technologies are less strongly represented.

- There is a satisfactory range of enrichment activities related to literacy with some events and visiting writers.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management are satisfactory and improving.

- Subject leadership has provided good direction and a sound framework for planning, leading to increasingly consistent approaches to teaching and assessment.
- Strategies for teaching writing are consistently applied and build effectively on the assessment of pupils' prior learning. Appropriate training has been provided in these key areas.
- The planning of thematic approaches is effective with regular opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy skills.
- There is an appropriate subject development plan based on a sound analysis of the strengths and weaknesses in English. The subject leaders are beginning to analyse assessment data thoroughly to identify areas for improvement.
- The recent work on improving writing is beginning to have an impact on attainment. Plans to improve reading skills, especially at the higher level, are well-founded but too recent to show improvement yet.

Subject issue: the teaching of spelling and handwriting

- Pupils are generally aware of the need to spell consistently and accurately.
- Teachers identify key spelling errors in pupils' work, but the process for pupils to correct and practise these varies across the school. Teachers use spelling activities as part of lesson plans where relevant.
- Younger pupils have regular handwriting practice. However, differences in fluency and control in older pupils' handwriting are not always noted in teachers' marking.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising attainment and improving pupils' progress by ensuring that all teachers:
 - use questions effectively to challenge pupils of differing attainment
 - develop pupils' listening skills further so that they learn from each other
- improving the curriculum further by enhancing opportunities for pupils to:
 - analyse and use a wider range of modern communication technology and forms of media

- learn more regularly from visitors, trips and events related to literacy.

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