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19 November 2009

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Dear Mr Couves

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 5 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 good.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is good.

- Attainment at the end of Year 6 has improved steadily and is well above average, based on provisional results for 2009. A high proportion of pupils achieved the higher Level 5 in English in 2009.
- Reading and writing were equally strong in the 2009 results, although the school's assessment data indicate that reading is stronger than writing in some other year groups.
- Pupils' progress is good; in 2009, almost all Year 6 pupils made expected progress and most made good progress.

- The small number of pupils who speak English as an additional language and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities also make good progress.
- In the lessons seen, pupils made generally good progress. They enjoyed their work and collaborated well. They maintained concentration well and contributed to discussion enthusiastically.

Quality of teaching in English

Teaching in English is good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons thoroughly, using a good range of activities which interest pupils.
- The best lessons have very clear learning objectives supported by detailed 'steps to success', which pupils use effectively to structure and review their work. These lessons set high expectations, focus strongly on progress and move at a good pace.
- Teachers and teaching assistants support pupils well, focusing on specific aspects of learning with selected groups of pupils.
- Where teaching is less effective, teachers do not give pupils sufficient opportunity to discuss and contribute their ideas.
- Teachers' marking is detailed and explains how pupils can improve their work. Pupils are confident in using the success criteria to assess their own work and that of their peers. They make sensible comments and know their targets for improvement.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The curriculum in English is good.

- Pupils enjoy English lessons, particularly the opportunity to be creative and to express their opinions.
- The curriculum is suitably broad and organised well. There is a good balance between reading and writing activities. Although pupils contribute well orally in the best lessons, the school is currently working to raise the profile of speaking, listening and drama. However, media topics and the use of modern technologies in communication are represented less well.
- Pupils' needs are met well through the planning of lessons to provide different tasks and support for pupils with varying levels of attainment.
- There is a good daily programme to develop pupils' literacy skills, such as spelling and handwriting, which is matched carefully to their ability.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management are good.

- The subject leader has a strong vision for English and knows its strengths and weaknesses, based on thorough analysis of pupils' national test papers and school assessment data.
- Effective strategies for improving writing and using assessment to focus teaching have led to rising standards.
- The subject leader monitors provision regularly through scrutiny of pupils' work and teachers' planning, in addition to observations of lessons. This information, along with analysis of pupils' progress, informs a subject improvement plan with relevant priorities.
- The subject leader acknowledges that there is some variation in teaching and provides training and support to improve particular aspects of English. This is beginning to improve the consistency of approach but some variation in quality remains.

Subject issue: the teaching of spelling and handwriting

- Spelling and handwriting have high priority and form an important part of the specific literacy skills programme taught each day.
- Teachers identify key spelling errors in pupils' work and encourage them to make corrections. They also use this information to plan the areas of spelling taught in the skills programme.
- Pupils' handwriting is assessed to identify areas of weakness and this informs the regular practice sessions across the school. Good presentation is affirmed through the prominent display of work.
- Pupils recognise the importance of spelling and handwriting and have good opportunities to practise both. They understand the marking and correction processes used to help them spell words accurately.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the consistency of the quality of teaching in English by:
 - identifying the very best practice and effective approaches and sharing them with all teachers
 - monitoring the specific aspects identified for improvement with a view to providing further training or support where necessary
- broadening the curriculum further by extending the opportunity for pupils to:
 - develop specific skills in speaking and listening
 - analyse and use different forms of media and modern communication technology.

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