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Ms M Bruce
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Dear Ms Bruce

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 22 March 2010 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 provision for gifted and talented pupils in English.

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.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is satisfactory.

- Children's language skills when they join the school, although varied, are in line with the national picture. Their attainment by the end of Year 6 is also broadly average, indicating satisfactory achievement for both boys and girls.
- Children are thriving in the very new Early Years Foundation Stage unit, although it is too soon to see the impact on their skills by the time they enter Year 1.

- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make slightly better progress than more able pupils, because the school provides more effective support for this group of pupils.
- Following a drive to improve pupils' writing, the school has seen some improvement across the age range. Discussion with pupils indicates they feel growing confidence in writing and their work reveals steady progress. However, the proportion reaching Level 5 is slightly below average.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory.

- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children have rich opportunities to use language in role-play and exploration. Through light but well-judged interventions, adults significantly support their progress.
- Teachers base pupils' learning on shared, practical experiences, such as talking about the figures they have modelled before writing descriptions. Teachers use modern technology confidently, sometimes involving the pupils in demonstrating skills. Pupils say that adults provide valued help with independent work.
- Recently, the school has used national guidance on assessing pupils' progress in writing to help focus teaching more effectively. Despite this, some pupils found the work set too hard in lessons observed, while others found it too easy. Opportunities were sometimes missed to help pupils understand what counts as good work, for example, when expectations were expressed in terms of quantity rather than quality, or key criteria went unexplained.
- Relationships are good but do not always give pupils enough responsibility and challenge. For example, teachers do not always involve pupils in setting high expectations for their work, solving problems collaboratively or explaining their responses fully.
- Teachers periodically review pupils' progress towards their targets. Marking and feedback give some helpful advice, but pupils are not consistently expected to act on it.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- The school's leadership has a clear view of the place of English within the curriculum and connects English activities constructively to other areas of learning. Teachers are encouraged to find opportunities for English work in pupils' first-hand experiences and to provide real purposes for their writing and talking.
- The school arranges a good variety of visits and special events which have promoted enjoyment of books, theatre and animation. Pupils regularly use computers for research and writing.

- Interventions are targeted appropriately on pupils' well-understood needs and have a positive impact on their progress and attitudes.
- The school's policies ensure regular opportunities for teachers to listen to and assess pupils' reading, provide guided reading sessions and encouragement for pupils to extend their reading outside school. As a result, pupils enjoy reading and make at least satisfactory progress.
- Recently, the school has focused on developing pupils' confidence as writers, and has seen early signs of improved progress as a result. There are sessions on spelling and handwriting and regular opportunities for extended writing. Teachers model note-making and drafting, and pupils are encouraged to talk about their writing.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are satisfactory.

- The school has set a sensible direction for work in English. The opportunity to create a separate Early Years Foundation Stage unit is being used well to provide for the early development of communication, language and literacy.
- The school has used its performance data to identify the need to improve standards of writing. The actions taken have led to some improvements in pupils' work and attitudes, although not yet to better test results. Pupils' progress is monitored and reviewed. The school is able to identify underperformance for individuals, including some higher attainers. However, plans to improve the progress of more able pupils are informal and have not, so far, had clear effect.
- Teachers have been given clearer expectations for approaches to teaching writing. They have worked together to ensure better focused assessment of progress in writing and to share effective practice.
- The subject is managed and promoted by a hard-working subject leader who works alongside you to monitor aspects of provision and to provide support and training for others.

Provision for gifted and talented pupils in English

The school carefully identifies pupils who are gifted and talented in particular aspects of the subject, including some who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Planning for their needs tends to be ad hoc. The school is inventive in finding individual enrichment opportunities for them, such as helping to direct the school play or representing pupils' views at a local meeting. In lessons, more able pupils are set different tasks but expectations are not always high enough.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising standards in writing, especially for the higher attaining pupils, by setting clearer expectations for quality

- extending pupils' understanding of how to improve their work by making more effective use of feedback.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop English in the school.

As I explained previously, 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