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Mrs D Gordon
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Gordon

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 21 March 2012 to look at work 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 without their consent.

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, two of which were done jointly with school leaders.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is good.

- Pupils' attainment has been well above average for most of the past five years. In 2011, results at the end of Key Stage 2 dipped slightly but remained above average. The school has taken effective steps to strengthen literacy across subjects and to develop pupils' grasp of skills and appreciation of literary techniques. The impact can be seen most clearly in the vividness of language and variety of form in pupils' writing of poetry, especially the work displayed in corridors and public spaces.
- Pupils make good progress, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities; for example, children with language and communication difficulties steadily gain confidence and secure skills in response to expert support in the language units.

- All pupils have a daily phonics session. Particularly good progress was seen in the Reception class, when the teacher used role play as an explorer to give the linking of letters and sounds a real-life context. In addition to recognising that what she pulled out of her bag began with 'b', children made decisions about where the 't' should go and what the letters and sounds were that connected the two. Their sense of achievement when the word took shape was exuberant.
- Pupils' written work shows clearest progress made by pupils of low and middle ability, with less able pupils in Year 3, for example, progressing over six months from short and disjointed sentences to more extended, legible and carefully structured writing. Most pupils speak of progress in terms of skills, rather than the development of imagination, ideas and style. While there are examples of good practice, more able pupils are not consistently challenged to develop their thinking in depth, to take the lead in class learning and to be inventive.
- Pupils' behaviour is excellent. In lessons, they collaborate constructively and assess their own and others' work confidently. They have positive attitudes to learning and clearly enjoy English, especially reading and writing stories. Their justifiable confidence in their teachers and support staff was encapsulated by a girl in the infant language unit: 'If you're struggling you can always ask an adult.'

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- Teachers' enthusiasm, subject knowledge and readiness to pursue topics across subject boundaries engage pupils' interest and encourage pupils to apply literacy skills in a range of contexts. Lesson plans set out clearly what is to be learnt, with strategies to support differing needs and learning styles, which are then carefully implemented. Teachers use open questions to encourage pupils to think for themselves and often, but not consistently, follow up pupils' responses to check understanding and to explore further possibilities. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is woven into most teaching and learning, often as the impetus for creative writing.
- On the few occasions when teaching is less effective, pupils are over-directed, with limited scope for decision-making and invention, and the most able are not fully challenged.
- Marking is thorough and balances praise with specific guidance – generally focusing on spelling, punctuation, sentence construction and presentation. Its impact is not always evident but pupils say they find it very helpful.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- The curriculum is topic-based, with units of work following national guidelines and progressively building pupils' literacy skills and appreciation

of fiction and non-fiction, both traditional and modern. It encourages pupils to match style and approach to different contexts –for example, news reports, diary entries, fairy tales, book reviews, poetry – and to read for pleasure. Although not as often as pupils would like, drama, film and animation are used effectively to extend pupils’ thinking and encourage experiment. Opportunities for pupils to work with information and communication technology are frequent and productive.

- English is very well enhanced by visiting writers, drama workshops, performances by secondary school students, activities with the Glyndebourne education department, and film and drama clubs.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is good.

- You and your deputy are driving steady improvement by setting clear and demanding targets, with a focus on combining rigour with creativity. The Key Stage 1 and the Key Stage 2 literacy coordinators and the assessment coordinator are having a positive impact on teaching and learning. Systematic monitoring and regular reviews of pupils’ progress are ensuring a prompt response to signs of underachievement. Perceptive assessment of teachers’ strengths and areas for development sets well-directed priorities for whole-staff training and targeted coaching. Capacity for further improvement is strong.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that all pupils, including the more able, are challenged to be innovative and independent learners.

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

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty’s Inspector