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Ms K Walker
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Walker

Ofsted 2013–14 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils during my visit on 27 February 2014 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 the school's most recent achievement data; and observation of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English requires improvement.

Achievement in English requires improvement.

- Standards in reading and writing are broadly average by the time pupils leave Year 6. They are improving over time; in 2013, pupils left school a term ahead in their learning. This is due to strong teaching at the top end of Key Stage 2 and the effective and timely small group sessions pupils access when they are at risk of falling behind.
- Pupils' progress across the rest of the school is too uneven. Children get off to a very good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. However, this firm foundation is not built on well enough in Year 1. Pupils have to race to catch-up in Year 2. Many make up lost ground in reading but not in writing. As a result, standards in writing are well below average by the time they join Year 3. Progress slows again in lower Key Stage 2 and pupils' learning is not sufficiently deepened.

- Disabled pupils and pupils with special educational needs do well because of the additional support they receive outside of class. Pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding (additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free schools meals, and a number of other groups) make similar progress to their classmates but they leave school two terms behind in their reading skills.
- Pupils' books and your own data show there is too much variation in the progress pupils make from their starting points. Too many pupils do not develop stamina or writing flair because they have limited opportunities to write at length. Some pupils have weak handwriting skills and gaps in their spelling knowledge.
- Pupils like writing, but they are not as enthusiastic about reading. They are willing workers who are keen to talk about their ideas. Pupils have a limited knowledge of authors and they find it difficult to pinpoint which books they enjoy the most.

Teaching in English requires improvement.

- All teachers use questions well to help pupils extend their ideas. They are equally good in promoting pupils' speaking and listening skills. This means pupils have the chance to think about and discuss their ideas before they put pen to paper.
- Some teaching is typically strong on a daily basis. However, evidence from pupils' books show this is not the case in all classrooms. Teaching is less effective when teachers do not expect enough from pupils; the work teachers accept is not always the best pupils can do for their age or ability.
- Teachers' marking does not help pupils to see what they need to do to improve. Some teachers are leading the way and making sure they give pupils greater guidance on how to become better writers. However, this good work is not making enough difference because pupils do not respond to the extra questions teachers pose.
- Most teachers provide helpful prompts to support pupils' skills in writing. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, a cosy area entices pupils to read to their heart's content. This good practice is not evident in all classrooms; not all teachers actively encourage pupils to read for pleasure or to discover new authors.

The curriculum in English requires improvement.

- You plan the curriculum carefully so pupils can build on their reading and writing skills as they move from class to class. Writing is often the lynchpin for linking subjects together to make pupils' learning more interesting. As a result, pupils develop their writing skills in other subjects. You are beginning to make some improvements to the teaching of early reading, but there is more to do to help pupils grasp more quickly the sounds that letters make.

- Although English activities have a sharp focus on speaking and listening, there is no clear framework to underpin this work. As a result, pupils' skills are not systematically built on as they move throughout the school and not all pupils benefit from drama lessons. Opportunities for information communication technology (ICT), including the use of multi-media technology, are not always grasped well enough to ensure the English curriculum is creative and innovative.

Leadership and management of English requires improvement.

- The subject leader has not been given the time to grasp the role and drive improvements in English. Her work in monitoring teaching is under-developed; it happens far too infrequently to help her gain an up-to-date view of the quality of teaching in reading and writing. As a result, actions to help teachers improve lack precision and detail.
- You know what teaching is typically like in reading and writing because you visit classrooms regularly to observe teachers. None of the findings from my visit came as a surprise to you because your own evidence has identified similar shortcomings. Nonetheless, you do not look at pupils' books often enough to check that all teachers are getting the very best out of pupils.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- tackling the uneven progress pupils make across the school by ensuring all pupils benefit from strong English teaching on a daily basis by:
 - improving the teaching of letters and sounds, extending pupils' knowledge of different authors and promoting pupils' desire to read for pleasure
 - providing greater opportunities for pupils to write at length so they improve their stamina and flair for writing
 - ensuring teachers expect the very best from all pupils and tackle weaknesses in pupils' handwriting and spelling skills
- ensuring that the use of drama, ICT and multi-media is systematically planned across the whole-school so all pupils have opportunity to use these tools in their everyday English lessons
- improving the role of the subject leader in driving improvements to the teaching of reading and writing.

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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson
Her Majesty's Inspector