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30 September 2009

Mrs N Park
St Bede's RC Voluntary Aided Primary
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Dear Mrs Park

Ofsted survey inspection programme – English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 21 September 2009, 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 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 made included: interviews with staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is outstanding.

Achievement in English

Pupils' achievement is outstanding.

- Standards on entry to the school are broadly in line with expectations. Several children start with communication skills below what is typical.
- Results for Year 6 pupils have risen steadily and significantly since 2007 and standards in English are currently well above average. Unconfirmed results for 2009 show that all pupils reached the expected level and two thirds reached Level 5. Pupils achieve the challenging targets set by the school. This reflects very good progress.

- Boys perform as well as girls in both reading and writing.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well, and there are no substantial differences in achievement between groups of pupils in the school.
- Progress in the lessons observed was good.
- The school recognises that standards have been higher in reading than in writing in both key stages. Changes have led to better results in writing. Last year, about three quarters of Year 6 achieved Level 5 in reading and about half in writing, a slightly smaller gap than is found nationally.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching is good.

- Pupils enjoy English lessons, are keen to get involved and concentrate well on collaborative or independent work. Several of those spoken to are enthusiastic readers and some love to write.
- Teaching was good overall in the lessons observed. Despite some recent changes to staffing, relationships with pupils were consistently very good and lessons were planned well to meet different needs. All classes benefited from support from well-qualified teaching assistants and sometimes parent volunteers. Teachers used displays and the interactive whiteboard to help make expectations clear and to model reading and writing. Activities were interesting and usually well paced so they engaged both boys and girls.
- Teachers sometimes needed to help pupils understand the purpose of activities and how to do them well. Evidence from lessons confirmed that pupils occasionally struggled to reach the highest levels expected because they needed further support and guidance. Recognising this, the school has plans to involve pupils more effectively in using success criteria to plan and evaluate their work.
- From an early age, pupils are set clear curricular targets in English that focus on key skills. The simple system used to show their progress in their books works well. In lessons, teachers used questioning well to assess progress. Good examples of marking were seen, which gave pupils clear guidance on areas of strength and weakness. In the best cases, pupils had improved their writing as a result.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The curriculum in English is good.

- The school's leadership is clear about the contribution of English to pupils' learning and sets high expectations for its use in every subject. The school has planned a broad English curriculum which pupils enjoy.
- The reading curriculum is particularly effective and leads to high standards. The school provides regular opportunities for teachers to listen

to children reading and to assess their progress; planned guided reading sessions; and effective encouragement for pupils to continue their reading outside school. As a result, pupils enjoy reading and make very good progress.

- The school's approach to writing has raised standards in this area, although they are not yet quite as high as in reading. Regular sessions on spelling and handwriting, as well as support for choosing words and constructing sentences, continue throughout the age range. Pupils are encouraged to talk and reflect before they write, to draw on shared reading and to draft and experiment together. They have regular opportunities for extended writing. Good spelling and handwriting are encouraged by regular practice, competitions and rewards.
- Information and communication technology is used well in English, for example to provide visual stimuli and to enable pupils to produce publications such as a class anthology of short stories.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The leadership and management of English are outstanding.

- A strong sense of direction guides the improvement of English. Clear guidance is provided to teachers about expectations for teaching reading, writing, speaking and listening.
- The school analyses performance data well and has used it to identify the need to improve standards of writing. The action taken, including sustained professional development, has resulted in significantly better test results.
- Pupils' progress is reviewed systematically with all teachers. Action to redress any underperformance by particular pupils is effective, so that all groups make good progress.
- Despite a handover in subject leadership and other staff changes, the planning to sustain improvement is proving to be very effective. Secure arrangements to monitor provision and guide teaching ensure that a good understanding of common approaches is evident across the enthusiastic team.

Spelling and handwriting

- Standards of spelling and handwriting are high, and pupils see these as skills worth developing.
- The school has coherent policies for promoting accurate spelling and controlled, fluent handwriting.
- Early learning about phonics is linked to strategies for reading and spelling unfamiliar words. Spellings are regularly learned for homework, with parents' help, and tested.
- Cursive writing is practised and marked. Interest in handwriting is successfully fostered by rewards in every class and there are high

expectations of presentation in all subjects. Older pupils' finished work is generally legible, although not all join their letters fluently.

No areas for development were identified which the school has not already identified itself.

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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half term and made available to the team for the next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Susan Bowles
Her Majesty's Inspector