



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS  
IN EDUCATION

**INSPECTING SUBJECTS AND ASPECTS 11-18**

**ENGLISH**

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# INSPECTING ENGLISH

## INTRODUCTION

As an inspector of English, you need to find out how good the pupils are at the subject, to what extent they understand what lies at its heart, and whether it captures their interest. You are likely to be able to explain your findings largely by evaluating the rate at which they progress and judging how stimulating and effective the teaching is.

## WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

These are the main questions which your inspection should answer.

- How high are the standards in English, and are they high enough?
- How well are pupils progressing?
- How well is English taught?

### Before you begin your inspection in the school

- Revise your knowledge of the *Handbook* and associated guidance.
- Where necessary, make sure you are familiar with the particular course objectives and the examination syllabuses used by the school.

*You should already have a good knowledge of the National Curriculum Programmes of Study for English and the level descriptions.*

- Analyse performance data to form a view of the standards achieved in recent years and any trends, and to establish hypotheses about strengths and weaknesses in English.
- Study any departmental documentation which has been made available, and evaluate its potential contribution to the quality of teaching and its coverage of curricular requirements.
- Check the school's policy on literacy and agree with the registered inspector how evidence of literacy will be collected.

### When you are in the school

- Use the first-hand evidence from observation of lessons, looking at pupils' work and talking with them to assess what the current pupils are like at the subject, what they do well, and where they could do better. Focus on the current pupils in the year groups in which they become 14, 16 and 18. Refer to the records of teachers' assessments of pupils' work. Establish attainment on entry and assess what progress pupils are making through the school - how rapid it is, on how wide a front and in what depth.

- Observe teaching, talk with teachers about their work, look at their plans and records, and judge how effective the teaching is - how it contributes to pupils' attitudes to learning, progress and standards. See which approaches work well and which are unsuccessful.
- Take stock of any other factors which affect the teaching of English and the standards achieved. In particular, assess how effectively the subject is led and managed.
- Make sure that your observation forms contain enough evidence to support your judgements; telling examples are needed for your subject report.

### **Literacy and information technology**

- Co-ordinate the contribution of other subjects to pupils' reading and writing, and ensure that these contributions are included in the English section.
- Evaluate any contribution which English makes to pupils' capability in information technology.
- Where information and communications technology is used to support pupils' learning in English, evaluate the extent to which it enhances the pupils' standards of work. Whilst the pupils may be working well below their competence in information technology, this may still be appropriate to the English task.
- Record your evidence and evaluations in the 'Other significant evidence' section of the observation form.

### **Feeding back your inspection findings**

- Feed back your findings clearly and helpfully to the head of English and to individual teachers by:
  - identifying the most important strengths and weaknesses in the teaching, and supporting your assessments with illustrations from the lessons you have seen;
  - giving convincing reasons for what you judge to be successful or otherwise, making clear how the teaching affects what is achieved;
  - showing the head of department how other factors, particularly leadership and management, affect the quality of teaching and the standards achieved;
  - ensuring that there is opportunity to discuss the findings and that points for development are identified.

### **Writing the subject section**

The English section of the report should tell a coherent and convincing story. It should explain why the standards achieved are as they are. In particular, you should evaluate and report on the effectiveness of the teaching. The following questions will help you to check the quality of your reporting.

- Are test and examination results interpreted so as to give a clear view of the standards attained and to show how they compare with other subjects in the school? Are there any trends over time?
- Are there clear judgements of what is achieved by the pupils in the years in which they become 14, 16 and 18? Are the strong and weak features identified in the different aspects of the subject?
- Is there a convincing explanation of any significant differences between what is seen and what results indicate?
- Are variations in the progress of different groups or in different years evaluated and explained?
- Does the evaluation of teaching spell out how it affects the pupils' response and what they achieve? Is it clear which teaching methods are successful and which are not? Is there an explanation of any other factors, such as leadership and management, which are significant in affecting standards?
- Is it clear how far standards and teaching have improved since the last inspection and are reasons given?
- Are the main judgements supported by the most telling examples?
- Is it clear what needs to be done to improve standards in English?

## **ATTAINMENT AND PROGRESS**

Your judgements on attainment will be based on **performance data** and direct **observations** in the school. Any differences between these judgements **must be explained convincingly**.

### **Interpreting data**

- For pupils aged 14, compare the school's National Curriculum results with:
  - the results achieved in all schools nationally;
  - the results achieved in schools with 'similar intakes' - by eligibility for free school meals - and to be so specified in the report;
  - the results achieved in mathematics and science in the school.
- For pupils aged 16:
  - compare the proportion of pupils failing to achieve a GCSE grade in English with the national proportion;
  - compare the school's GCSE results with:
    - the results achieved in all schools nationally;
    - the results for schools of 'similar type' - comprehensive, selective or modern - and to be so specified in the report;

- the results achieved in other subjects in the school.

*The comparisons with similar schools and with other subjects are indications whether standards are as high as they should be. If there are any value-added analyses, these should provide clues to the progress which pupils make over time. In interpreting results, you may need to refer to contextual matters, such as a change in the syllabus, the nature of the year group and the department's approach to improving the results of boys.*

*For 16 year olds, the key indicators are those which relate to the whole year group, not simply those who are entered for GCSE. The pupils who fail to achieve a GCSE grade are unlikely to be adequately prepared for the language demands of adult life or to be confident in their understanding and use of written language.*

*Policies for entering pupils for English literature vary. Some schools enter all pupils both for English and for English literature. In such cases, there may be further significant differences between the results obtained by boys and girls respectively. Some schools make English literature an option for the higher attaining pupils, which is reflected in the percentage of higher grades achieved, and may well be higher than the percentage for English. There is likely to be a large proportion of high achieving girls in the option groups. Such groupings may have an impact on the take-up of English in the sixth form.*

- Evaluate the A-level and AS results, comparing them with the national results, including those for schools of a similar type. Look at results over several years and take account of performance in GCSE and any value-added measures.

*In making judgements, you will need to **exercise caution** because of the various factors at play, such as the numbers involved and the nature of the students and courses.*

### **Using evidence from observations**

- For English, judge the standards of pupils' work and their progress in speaking and listening, reading and writing. Consider what is typical in relation to the National Curriculum Programmes of Study and to the expectations for the courses which they follow, including those in the sixth form.

***Significant weakness in any aspect compared with others means that standards overall cannot be high enough.***

- For pupils aged 14, use teachers' assessments alongside your observations as an indicator of attainment and a means of investigating issues such as the relative attainment of boys and girls.
- For other subjects, assess pupils' competence in English, with particular reference to literacy. You will need to collect contributions from all inspectors in the team.

*Clearly, achievements in literacy make a vital contribution to attainment in most subjects. Conversely, subjects other than English have a role to play in helping pupils to read and write with increasing fluency, accuracy and understanding.*

- Also judge standards in drama and in the use of English by pupils for whom it is an additional language.
- Judge the **progress** which pupils make in each year, referring to any significant differences between particular groups, such as able pupils, those with special educational needs, and boys and girls.

*The evidence comes from talking with pupils, looking at their written work and seeing how they get on in lessons - how much do they learn and at what rate?*

*For pupils with special educational needs, including those in special schools, judgements on standards, particularly progress, should be made taking into account their best means of communicating - for example, by computer or other form of technology. There may be a need for pupils to do work pitched at levels lower than is normally associated with their age.*

- When in lessons, **listen** to the kinds of talk the pupils engage in, assess the good and weak features in their speaking and see whether they participate in a range of activities as they should.
- Use evidence from **talking** with pupils in lessons and from the inspection of the school library, in judging the range, quality and use of reading.
- **Observe** note-making, drafting and the process of writing to contribute to your judgements about the quality and improvement of pupils' work.
- **Use formal and informal discussion with pupils** to add to evidence from lesson observation.

*Interviews with groups of pupils give opportunities to assess how well they can explore and develop ideas. Discussion with individual pupils gives pointers to their thinking about writing tasks both before and after completion, and whether they can express themselves clearly and listen to others. You should talk to pupils specifically about the use of language and about literature, and judge the extent to which they are critical of their own work.*

- **Interview a sample of pupils** to assess their accuracy, fluency and understanding in reading and their oral skills.
- **Read a sample of pupils' written work** provided by the school, looking for evidence of progress as well as attainment.

*The sample could include: the full range of pupils' exercise books and folders of work; writing for display; word-processed writing; informal writing; and examples of narrative, poetry, play scripts, non-fiction and responses to literature.*

- Use the records kept by teachers and, in some cases, by pupils, to gain additional evidence of pupils' standards.

*For example, reading logs or diaries contain useful information about the breadth of pupils' reading and their interest in books. Teachers' records should provide evidence of pupils' earlier attainment in all aspects of English. Ask for the results of reading tests and for teachers' assessments of speaking and listening.*

- **Use tapes and other recorded materials**, where available, as evidence of aspects of talking, attainment in drama, collaborative work and formal language tasks.
- As you **observe pupils** in lessons, **look at their work**, and **talk with them**, use evidence of the extent to which they can:
  - use the vocabulary and grammar of standard English;
  - speak audibly, clearly and fluently, as the situation demands, for a wide range of audiences and purposes;
  - distinguish between formal and informal language in their own speech and writing;
  - use an extensive vocabulary, including grammatical, literary and critical terms, particularly at ages 14 to 18;
  - listen with understanding and respond appropriately (for example, in discussion of their reading and the use of language);
  - read accurately and fluently, with understanding;
  - demonstrate that they are independent readers of a wide range of genres, of pre-twentieth century literature and texts from different cultures and traditions;
  - use sources of information, showing skills such as those of selection, comparison, synthesis and discrimination between fact and opinion;
  - communicate meaning clearly and accurately in writing, with a choice of styles and a range of forms;
  - improve their writing through drafting and proof-reading.

*These attributes will help you to shape your analysis of strengths and weaknesses in English as well as the overall judgements about attainment. Remember that in your reporting you need to go further than just citing the attributes; draw on the most telling evidence which exemplifies them.*

## **PUPILS' ATTITUDES TO LEARNING**

- Look out for the following characteristics in the pupils:



- willingness to listen, take part in discussions and respond to others' views;
- the capacity to enjoy reading and readiness to use books and other sources of information;
- willingness to improve writing through drafting, editing and proof-reading;
- participation in extra-curricular activities such as writing for school magazines, joining a school drama club or visiting the theatre;
- the development of independence and initiative in their thinking and responses.

## TEACHING

- Judge the quality of teaching by weighing its strengths and weaknesses according to the criteria in the *Framework*, and assess its **impact on educational standards**.

*Teaching cannot be satisfactory where pupils, or a significant minority of them, learn less than you would expect considering what they already knew. The same is true if they do not firmly consolidate their learning.*

- Inform your views by reference to the characteristics of effective English lessons, in which teachers:
  - demonstrate a fluent and confident knowledge of the spread of fiction, poetry and plays which are at the core of the subject (*subject knowledge*);
  - show in their planning how progress in the skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening is structured, developed and consolidated, with due attention to different groups of pupils, including the most able and those who experience difficulties in learning (*subject knowledge, planning, match to need*);
  - emphasise effective communication in speech and writing, explain why it matters, make pupils aware of what is required and let them know the progress they are making towards it (*subject knowledge, match to need, planning, expectations, assessment*);
  - provide varied, challenging reading which takes account of their pupils' previous attainment in reading and broadens and extends their horizons; this means, for example:
    - teaching Shakespeare so that feeling, ideas and the force of language are communicated and the plays are seen as having a current and contemporary power on page, stage, film or television;
    - teaching poetry in ways which create pleasure, understanding and response to language and form, and the desire in pupils to write poetry of their own;
    - teaching fiction through class, group or individual reading in ways which involve and engage pupils in the character, motive, language, and development of the story;

- teaching the skills of reading non-fiction in a structured way to bring out selection, comparison, evaluation and distinction between fact and opinion (*match to needs, expectations, pace, challenge, subject knowledge*);
- develop focused talk with specific attention to the tasks set, the grouping of pupils, the purposes of the talk, and a range of skills - agreement, explanation, evaluation, persuasion and negotiation (*match to needs, method, expectations, planning*);
- teach writing by helping pupils to understand what is needed to write clearly and accurately in a range of forms including non-fiction, with particular focus on pupils who experience difficulties; provide good examples for pupils to discuss and analyse, explain and illustrate how choice of vocabulary and style are influenced by audience and purpose; and show pupils how to draft, edit and proof-read their work (*subject knowledge, methods, planning, expectations*);
- make clear the rules of spelling and punctuation and teach pupils how to learn and retain spelling and to cope with irregular and unusual forms (*subject knowledge, match to need, planning, expectations*);
- show how grammatical features and conventions operate and how writing can be elaborated, clarified or re-organised by the way it is worded; advise how to avoid grammatical errors; and explain how to recognise grammatical features in different types of text (*subject knowledge, method, expectations, planning*);
- explain the difference between the kinds of language used in speech and writing and the points of contrast in style and language between different texts; teach pupils how and when to use standard English; and give them some understanding of the ways in which English changes, with new words coming into the language at different times (*subject knowledge, match to need, planning, expectations*);
- show that they have successful ways of improving boys' performance (*method, expectations, planning*);
- create a productive ethos, such as a silent classroom for sustained writing (*method*);
- show how information and communications technology can make pupils more critical and improve their communication skills (*subject knowledge, planning*).

**All teachers of English should provide good models of spoken and written language for pupils as they teach.**

- **Look with particular care when evaluating teaching which may have superficially positive features**, but which lacks the rigour, depth, insights and command of good subject teaching, such that pupils' progress is less than it should be. Examples might be as follows:
  - individual, silent reading in classes where the time is not well used because the teacher has no specific role and pupils' progress is not monitored and skills in reading are not extended;

- group work which is in name only, in which pupils sit together, but there is no clear structure for them to speak or listen to good purpose in different contexts;
- drafting and re-drafting which is little more than making a neat copy;
- drama lessons without any planned development of skills or understanding of language and form, and without critical reflection on the activity;
- reading for information, where the task has no clear focus or purpose, where the outcome is ill-defined, where pupils do not have the skills to select and use what they need and where, in consequence, they copy indiscriminately without understanding.

## **OTHER ASPECTS OF PROVISION AND MANAGEMENT**

### **Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

- Be alert to occasions when English makes a major contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through:
  - developing confidence and expertise in language, which is an important aspect of individual and social identity;
  - enabling pupils to understand and engage with the feelings and values embodied in high quality poetry, fiction, drama, film and television;
  - developing pupils' awareness of moral and social issues in fiction, journalism, magazines, radio, television and film;
  - helping pupils to understand how language changes over time, the influences on spoken and written language, and social attitudes to the use of language.

### **Libraries**

- Judge the role which the school library plays in developing reading and the ability to learn from the printed word, both in English and in other subjects.

*In English, the library should contribute to standards by:*

- *providing resources of good quality to enable pupils to select, synthesise and compare sources of information and make effective use of them;*
- *extending the range of reading of fiction, poetry and plays beyond examination courses, so that pupils respond imaginatively and intellectually within a broad programme of reading;*
- *broadening pupils' horizons and developing individual pleasure in reading through a range of good quality non-fiction texts, including autobiographies, biographies, journals, diaries, letters, newspapers, and magazines.*

## Drama

- Judge drama as part of National Curriculum English and, if it is so taught, as a subject in its own right.

*Drama may be offered to pupils age 14 to 16, alongside the other arts. It is an increasingly popular GCSE and A-level subject.*

- Also assess how drama is used as a method of learning in other subjects.
- For pupils aged 11 to 16, assess drama within two main categories:
  - making and presenting drama;
  - appreciating and appraising it.
- Pay particular attention to how well pupils:
  - use imagination, with belief and feeling;
  - create drama with conviction and concentration;
  - respond sensitively to their own work and that of others;
  - use a range of dramatic skills, techniques, forms and conventions to express ideas and feelings effectively;
  - grasp and use dramatic concepts effectively, recalling, recording and evaluating their own work and that of others.
- When **in lessons**, expect to see evidence of:
  - co-operation in creating and communicating effective drama;
  - the use of drama to widen experience of English, especially through the use of speaking and listening and purposeful reading;
  - the integration of language skills for a creative purpose;
  - the contribution of drama to the pupils' social and moral development and understanding.
- **Observe** assemblies and extra-curricular activities such as drama groups and performances.

*Pupils' response to performance will extend the evidence of what they know, understand and can do. You need to recognise, though, that it is sometimes the more committed pupils who undertake these activities.*
- Use **records and recordings**, including sound or video recordings and photographs, as evidence of previous attainment, from which to gauge progress.

- Study pupils' drama logs as evidence of understanding, response and personal development.
- Use teachers' records as a source of evidence about previous attainment, especially if they are kept for drama and not just for speaking and listening.

### English as an additional language

- In the same way as for all pupils, make judgements on the standards attained by pupils learning English as an additional language.

*However, in coming to a judgement about the standards achieved by such pupils, you should judge whether the tasks they are asked to do have been properly adjusted to recognise their circumstances and to meet their needs in English, which are:*

- *enhanced opportunities for speaking and listening;*
  - *effective models of spoken and written language;*
  - *a welcoming environment in which they feel confident and can contribute;*
  - *a recognition of the role played by the first or home language in the development of English;*
  - *ways of helping them to cope with their various subjects;*
  - *detailed profiles of their linguistic development to enable further planning and target-setting to take place.*
- Use **lessons** to assess pupils' language development, but also **observe pupils new to English in less formal situations**, such as in small groups, and in activities where they have support so that they can participate with confidence.

*In some lessons, a support teacher will be the catalyst for such activities but, where no adult is available, the class teacher's planning should incorporate other ways of giving support.*

- Where pupils receive help from support teachers and have profiles of work available, use these in your evidence and see if they are integrated into mainstream records.
- When sampling pupils' reading and written work in English, include pupils whose English is at different levels of development.

### Gathering evidence

- Since you have responsibility for evaluating English in all its applications, make sure that you plan carefully to gather the necessary evidence:
  - brief other colleagues on what is needed to report on reading and writing in other subjects;

- choose a balanced programme of lessons to reflect:
  - the year groups in the school;
  - speaking and listening, reading, writing and drama;
  - special educational needs;
  - support for pupils with English as an additional language;
- arrange for the inspection of samples of writing throughout the inspection and for opportunities to hear pupils read, and talk to them about their reading;
- arrange to see video and other recorded evidence, especially of work in drama;
- determine the range of extra-curricular and non-classroom observation which may be required, including interviews with pupils and the continuing scrutiny of pupils' work;
- arrange for the inspection of any additional support given to pupils for whom English is an additional language.

## **OBSERVATION FORMS**

There follow two sample observation forms for English. These are intended to show how evidence and judgements contribute to a coherent picture of attainment in these English lessons. In one lesson, the teaching is judged to be 'very good' (grade 2) and in the other it is considered 'satisfactory' (grade 4).

**ENGLISH YEAR 10 MIXED ABILITY - Very good teaching**

<p><b>CONTEXT:</b> Sequence of work on Orwell's "Animal Farm" for whole class study; GCSE lit chosen text; lesson time included direct teaching, group discussion, leading to group presentation and homework.</p>
<p><b>TEACHING:</b> V good subject expertise evident in knowledge of novel's structure, political context, the "fable" element, and in explanation of "rhetoric" as a linguistic term; high quality opening reading of Napoleon establishing power. Balance and integration of reading, discussion, group work and summary v well matched to lesson objectives and ps' abilities, and makes highly effective use of time available. Challenging group tasks set for three different attainment groups - most able more analytic, least able closely focused on text, but linked thematically with Napoleon's rise to power.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Grade 2</p>
<p><b>RESPONSE:</b> Careful listening and evident interest in the structure of the story and fate of the characters. Good questions raised by groups reflect the familiarity of class with this approach; ps organised tasks within group; handled very well to prepare presentation within the time available. Groups reacted well to each others' presentations and asked for clarification, where necessary, in a productive way. Very good response to teacher's closing summary.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Grade 2</p>
<p><b>ATTAINMENT:</b> Higher attainers working at level 7/8, in understanding of persuasive language and conventions of the "fairy tale", in selecting and analysing from Orwell's prose. Ability to prioritise events well to make a point about the novel's moral basis. Lower attainers respond at level 5/6 to horror of the slaughter of hens in Napoleon's rise to power.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Grade 4</p>
<p><b>PROGRESS:</b> Good gains for more able in understanding of concepts of power and ruthlessness in politics, as presented obliquely by the novel's structure. Good progress for less able in finding evidence within text to sustain the view of Napoleon as ruthless dictator. Very good development of skills for group presentation.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Grade 2</p>

**ENGLISH YEAR 8 MIXED ABILITY - Satisfactory teaching**

<p><b>CONTEXT:</b> Language study (language change and variety). Worksheet containing "import" words for pupils to spot, as start, in this introductory unit on language (eg banana, desperado, poncho, incognito, assassin, rucksack, waltz). Task includes re-reinforcement involving alphabetical ordering.</p>
<p><b>TEACHING:</b> Sound linguistic knowledge eg of current patterns and pressures on language although less secure on the reasons behind language change. Strengths in methodology are the good range of interesting ideas presented and the well-conceived paired discussion on words identified from other languages. Weakness is that task is same for all, with different parts matched better to different abilities. Class well managed with constructive relationships. Homework set towards the end but discussion was rushed and lacked clarity.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Grade 4</p>
<p><b>RESPONSE:</b> Ps show interest and curiosity in this new topic and work well together in the opening stages. But less involvement later with some uncritical acceptance of the CT's views, particularly by the lower attainers. Behaviour good but lack of clarity over the homework task produced a little restlessness.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Grade 4</p>
<p><b>ATTAINMENT:</b> Most show satisfactory understanding about the different strands in the origin and composition of English. Higher attaining select and identify a good range of words, and make well-substantiated inferences about the patterns and origins of import words (L5). But characteristics of a concise definition and how to write it are not understood by the lower attainers.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Grade 4</p>
<p><b>PROGRESS:</b> Consolidation for higher attainers not v demanding but reading and understanding improve well through more challenging paired work. Less able think hard to succeed with the alphabetical task, getting most from this consolidation, but don't cope well with how new or import words might enter current English usage. Generally good work rate although this falls off for less able towards the end of the lesson.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Grade 4</p>

## ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This is one of a set of booklets which make up *Inspecting subjects and aspects 11-18*. The set consists of:

- an introductory booklet, *General guidance*, which is for all inspectors who evaluate the work of secondary age pupils - it is mainly about inspecting subjects;
- separate booklets on inspecting specific subjects and aspects; the contents page of *General guidance* shows the subjects and aspects which have booklets.

The main points in the *General guidance* are summarised in each subject, but if you are inspecting the work of secondary age pupils you should read the introductory booklet so that you are fully in the picture of what you have to do.

The contents of all the booklets are on the Internet and can be accessed from OFSTED's website [<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>]. This will allow you to obtain guidance for individual subjects or aspects.

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