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Mr J P Hickman  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Hickman

### **Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: English**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 25 and 26 January 2011 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 students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of eight part-lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is satisfactory.

### **Achievement in English**

Achievement in English is satisfactory.

- Attainment in English is variable but has improved in most areas over the last three years. In 2010, the attainment of Year 11 students was broadly average in GCSE English Literature, exceeding the school's target. However, in GCSE English it was below average. Sixth-form students reached standards that were broadly average. The attainment of Year 9 students, as indicated by teachers' assessments, also improved and was broadly average. The school's assessment of current Year 11 students indicates that around 60% are on track to achieve GCSE grades A\* to C.
- In 2010, students made satisfactory progress in GCSE English Literature and in the sixth form. However, progress in GCSE English was below expectations. The school's assessment information for current Year 11 students indicates that over 70% are making the progress expected of

them. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities made less progress than their peers in 2010 leading to substantial changes to courses. Early monitoring of students' progress in the Year 7 literacy programme indicates that most have improved their reading age.

- In the lessons observed, students made satisfactory and sometimes good progress. They mostly concentrated well, followed instructions carefully and worked together in pairs and groups effectively. Students responded well to teachers' questions, especially when given time to think or to discuss with peers. They settled to writing promptly. However, the accuracy of students' writing was variable with some making basic errors too frequently.

### **Quality of teaching in English**

The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge. They plan lessons thoroughly with clear objectives which are translated into different expectations for students of differing abilities, linked to their targets. However, this is not always followed up with tasks and resources designed to challenge students at different levels. Teachers use a wide range of activities to engage students' interest, supported by good relationships in class. Lessons are structured well and students say that they enjoy English.
- Teachers use questions effectively to encourage students to explain and justify their ideas. In the best lessons, they involve a full range of students by asking the right question to the right student at the right time. In other lessons, some students remain silent, not volunteering any answers and not being drawn into discussion.
- Teachers mark students' work regularly and provide grades or levels in addition to guidance on what to improve. In the best examples, these targets are clear and helpful but this is not always the case. Too often the marking does not show students where in their work they have achieved or failed to achieve the target. This often includes important basic errors which are not routinely identified and followed up.

### **Quality of the curriculum in English**

The quality of the curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is suitably broad, covering fiction, non-fiction, poetry and media. Homework tasks are organised well through the school's intranet.
- The faculty has reviewed the curriculum and made changes to improve achievement. For example, Year 10 students will enter English early. Year 9 students who are following diploma courses take functional skills tests. A literacy support programme is offered to selected Year 7 students.
- Enrichment opportunities for students are satisfactory, with theatre trips, competitions and programmes for students who are gifted or talented.

## **Effectiveness of leadership and management in English**

Leadership and management in English are satisfactory.

- Clear aims for English and expectations of teachers ensure that provision is consistent. Schemes of work are organised well, easily accessible electronically and supported by a wide range of resources.
- The subject leader has analysed recent examination results thoroughly and has identified key areas for improvement. These inform a relevant improvement plan which contains appropriate strategies to raise achievement. Students' progress is monitored closely and reviews of performance against the school's targets are regular.
- The subject leader has a sound understanding of strengths and areas for development. Self-evaluation is detailed, though the evaluation of new strategies is at an early stage. Effective practice, while acknowledged, is not yet sufficiently shared and adopted across the team.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- improving students' attainment and progress by ensuring that teachers:
  - match work closely to students' differing abilities and the outcomes expected of them
  - target questions so that students of all abilities are involved in answering at some stage in a lesson
- further refine teachers' assessment of students by:
  - ensuring that important basic errors in students' work are identified and followed up effectively
  - making sure that the targets set for students on how to improve are highlighted clearly in their work
- ensuring that strategies to improve students' achievement are evaluated carefully so that the most effective practice may be identified and shared.

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

As I 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. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Martin Cragg**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**