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Mr P Cozier  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Cozier

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

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 28 and 29 September 2010 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 eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is satisfactory.

### **Achievement in English**

Achievement in English is satisfactory.

- Standards in English have been slightly below average at the end of Key Stage 4 in recent years. The proportion of students who achieve A or A\* grades is, however, better than average. The school enters most of the students for GCSE English Literature and attainment in this subject is slightly higher than in English Language.
- Recent GCSE results indicate that progress has been broadly average, with a dip in 2009. Girls make more progress than boys in English. Some other groups, including students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and students for whom English is not their home language, also do less well than might be expected. More able students make better progress.

- Evidence from completed coursework and other assessments of the current Year 11 group suggest that attainment is higher than last year.
- Progress was at least satisfactory in lessons observed. Students are keen to learn and behave well. However, some students soon lose interest if the teaching is not sufficiently pacy or engaging. Some students are highly articulate, expressing thoughtful and complex ideas confidently.
- Standards at A level are broadly average in English Literature. Progress has been at least satisfactory and sometimes good in recent years. Results for the first group of A-level English Language students were good last year, showing very strong progress.

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

The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory.

- Teaching observed was at least satisfactory and much was good. Relationships in classes were secure and the most effective teachers had high expectations of students' behaviour. Lessons were well planned and structured, making good use of a range of mostly active approaches. Students have frequent opportunities to develop their speaking abilities through pair and small group work. Lessons were also marked by effective modelling of the writing process by teachers.
- Where lessons were not as effective, this was sometimes because the pace of learning was slow and students became disengaged. Some teachers were not always skilful enough at ensuring that lessons met the needs of students of varying ability. Although the more able students were usually challenged effectively, some of the less academic students needed greater support at times.
- Students mostly enjoy English and find their teachers helpful and supportive. In addition, they praise the clarity of instructions and recognise the extent to which most teachers make learning enjoyable.
- Formal assessments are carried out regularly and students' work retained in individual portfolios. This work is marked in detail and provides helpful guidance to students on areas of strengths and weaknesses. Routine work is not always marked as effectively or used to reinforce the targets set through the formal assessments.

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

The curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- The recent introduction of A-level English Language has widened the choice available for students in the sixth form.
- The curriculum provided is broad and balanced. The department is currently working to extend and improve schemes of work across the different key stages. The Key Stage 3 curriculum includes some interesting individual units that have some potentially innovative links with other areas of the curriculum. Assessment is well integrated. However, the rationale for the overall shape of the programme is not clear, with

questions arising about the structure and pacing of units, alongside issues of continuity and progression.

- Students are provided with a broad experience of literary texts with good concentration on developing the analytical skills needed for the GCSE English Literature course. However, there are gaps in using information and communication technology, including moving image work, to develop skills in English - techniques that are often associated with engaging boys more effectively - and some opportunities are missed to provide for more creative responses to the texts studied.
- Teachers devote a considerable amount of time to supporting students outside lessons with their examination work, for example through well-targeted lunchtime and evening revision classes. The First Story club is an imaginative initiative aimed mainly at gifted and talented students. In other respects, the range of enrichment activities available in English is rather limited. For example, several students expressed the view that they would welcome more opportunities for theatre visits in English.

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

Leadership and management in English are satisfactory.

- The new departmental leadership team has made a good start this term. Priorities have been clearly established and they have produced detailed plans to ensure that Year 11 students are fully prepared for all aspects of their GCSE course and achieve more highly. This includes substantial intervention support and a significant emphasis on improving speaking and listening results.
- There is a good recognition at all levels that results in English at the end of Key Stage 4 should be higher. The school has increased teaching time for English and introduced helpful initiatives to develop literacy across the curriculum, including targeted work with some Year 7 students.
- There is a clear sense of direction to work in English and the newly appointed head of department has appropriately high expectations about students' progress.
- Good and systematic monitoring and evaluation ensure that the school's self-evaluation in English is realistic. Lesson observations are regular and focus well on learning and progress; they also provide detailed feedback to staff, including work in the sixth form.
- The subject action plan currently lacks detail about how the quality of teaching is to be further enhanced or how attainment is to be improved, especially for underperforming groups of students.

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

- improving students' progress by the end of Key Stage 4, especially for boys and other underachieving groups, by:
  - reviewing the coherence, rigour and pace of the Key Stage 3 curriculum

- improving the consistency of teaching, including strategies to engage all students and ensure that activities match their different learning needs
- improving the focus on teaching and outcomes for students within the subject action plan.

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

**Philip Jarrett**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**