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Mr J Rowe
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Dear Mr Rowe

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 19 and 20 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 good.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is good.

- The attainment of Year 11 students in 2010 was above average with 74% achieving a higher GCSE grade A* to C in English. Results in GCSE English Literature were also above average, especially for grades A* and A.
- Students from a wide range of backgrounds achieve well. Overall, students' progress from their starting points was good. Those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities made less progress than their peers in 2010. The school recognises this and now allocates teachers with specialist expertise to these groups.
- Sixth-form students achieve standards which are broadly average. Results in 2009 were above average. In 2010 they were broadly average with a decline in the proportion achieving the higher grades A* to B, although the pass rate remained high.

- In the lessons observed, students made good progress. They concentrated well and settled to work promptly, listening attentively. They collaborated well in pairs or groups, showing enthusiasm for discussion. In the better lessons, students were confident and most volunteered to answer questions. However, in some lessons, a minority of students were more reticent and some avoided making contributions to class discussion.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons thoroughly with clear objectives which are focused on learning. Lessons are well structured and teachers check students' understanding and progress regularly. Teachers use a good range of tasks and resources, engaging students through film clips and presentations using interactive whiteboards.
- Relationships in lessons are good and teachers encourage students to achieve, providing effective support through teaching assistants for those who find learning difficult and challenge to extend the higher attainers.
- Teachers generally use questions well to stimulate discussion. In the best lessons, teachers use very effective questioning to extend students' thinking and to prolong debate so that ideas are tested and developed.
- Teachers often link learning closely to grade or level criteria, setting clear expectations for students. Students know their target grades and these are recorded, along with their performance in assessments, in their books. Teachers' marking is detailed and provides comments which relate to the main objectives of the work. However, the targets set to help students improve their work vary in quality between teachers.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- The curriculum is suitably broad and balanced with appropriate coverage of non fiction, poetry and media texts. However, students have too few opportunities to study modern communications and use computer technology in English. Students are entered for English GCSE in the November of Year 11 and this has been very effective in raising achievement. It has been particularly successful in improving results in English Literature which is taken in the summer of Year 11.
- Schemes of work are organised well and provide clear guidance for teachers, supported by a good range of resources. Assessment tasks are integrated carefully into the schemes and provide regular checks on students' performance. The department has planned the implementation of new courses in Years 10 and 12 very thoroughly. The innovative approach to setting homework projects linked to the topics studied each half-term has led to high-quality extended writing and effective preparation for speaking and listening presentations.

- A sound range of enrichment activities is linked to English, such as theatre trips, a visiting author and 'Dragon's Den' presentation. However, students have fewer opportunities to gain experience of how English is relevant in the world of work.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are good.

- The subject leader provides very clear direction for English and is extremely well organised. Careful analysis of students' performance and reflection on aspects of teaching and the curriculum inform effective planning for improvement. The resulting priorities are relevant and well-focused.
- The subject leader sets clear expectations. Efficient subject documentation ensures good consistency of approach in lesson planning and teaching. The department works well as a team, sharing planning and resources.
- Students' performance and progress are monitored carefully. Intervention is effective for those who are not making sufficient progress. The subject leader has an accurate understanding of the strengths and areas for development in the subject. With the team, she is committed to continuing improvement and ensuring success for all students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that all teachers provide detailed guidance to students on exactly how to improve their work
- developing the curriculum further by:
 - broadening the range of enrichment opportunities which bring students into contact with English as it is applied outside the school
 - extending the opportunities for students to study modern communications and use computer technology in English.

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