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Mr P Trickett
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Trickett

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 2 and 3 February 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 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is good.

- Attainment in GCSE English is below average but rising well. Students make good progress from starting points which are overall below average. This is true for all groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The school has been particularly successful in raising the attainment of boys and students known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportions of these groups who achieved grade C or higher last year equalled the national average.
- Results attained by students entered for GCSE English Literature and Media Studies are in line with the average.
- In the recent past, few students have attained grades B, A or A* in English. This is changing. The results from examinations already taken this

year show that more Year 11 students are reaching these high grades. Some students are making an impressive four levels of progress from the age of 11.

- The quality of learning seen in lessons and the progress evident in students' work were broadly good. Relationships are good. Students described their work with enthusiasm and most felt that they were making progress.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- Key good qualities include teachers' enthusiasm for language and literature and their flair for making learning lively and relevant to life outside the classroom. For example, cooking Chinese New Year food outdoors stimulated one class to use descriptive language vividly; collaborating to compose web-based resources gave another class a clear sense of audience and persuasive style.
- Teachers know their students' strengths and weaknesses well and adapt their plans effectively. They make creative use of their resources to enable all students to tackle challenging tasks. Some use information and communication technology well to illustrate concepts or to model the process of writing. Upbeat, warm and patient relationships encourage all students to try hard. Teachers take good account of students' diverse backgrounds and experience of English and emphasise the need for standard English.
- Teachers' skills in managing independent learning vary. For example, teachers provide opportunities for collaborative and exploratory group work, but do not always structure them well enough to enable students to move forward by themselves. Some questioning by teachers skilfully checked and deepened students' understanding, but at times teachers talked too much, leaving students passive and insufficiently challenged.
- Regular marking usually pinpoints what students need to do to improve and teachers give students useful individual guidance. Some skilfully involve students in understanding their targets and evaluating their learning.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- Within a framework which ensures balance and progression, teachers select texts and activities to suit their students. They use this freedom creatively to reflect their students' experiences and interests. Thus, a Year 7 class had greatly enjoyed sharing their own choice of poetry, and Year 9 classes were reading different poems in different ways, selected to match their needs.
- English contributes well to innovation, such as the cross-curricular development for Year 7, The Zone. For half of the time allocated for

English, students practise literacy, numeracy and learning skills in the context of subjects such as science, history and geography. The effect on students' overall progress in English is being monitored carefully.

- Enrichments include some enterprising use of technology, for example to run a school radio station and share ideas online, visits to the theatre and from authors, and performances and competitions.
- The curriculum is tailored to ensure that virtually all students secure at least one qualification in English. Options include GCSE in English Literature, drama or media studies. Students can enter early for GCSE English, re-sit to raise grades or take a functional English qualification. Adjustments to groupings and extra support sessions cater for students' different rates of progress.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are good.

- The direction for English is clear, well informed by national developments and reflecting an up-to-date vision for the subject. Staff are encouraged to show initiative and their work is well regarded. Teamwork is such that, despite the temporary absence of the subject leader, developments continue at a good pace.
- The team of enthusiastic teachers has worked together to develop the curriculum and to share their skills, most recently in using information and communication technology. It works well with other subjects and learning support services to maximise students' overall achievement.
- Targets reflect high aspirations, and the continuing rise in attainment indicates good capacity to improve further. A wide range of evidence, including students' work and views, is used to evaluate the curriculum for English. Subject documentation gives teachers a helpful framework within which to plan. The improvement plan is concise and relevantly focused on making English even better, although rather imprecise about teachers' responsibilities.
- Monitoring by the subject leader has led to improvements in, for example, the consistency of marking. However, to raise achievement further, greater consistency in the quality of teaching is needed.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- further raising attainment in English, including the proportion of students who attain the highest grades at GCSE
- improving the consistency of teaching through sharing existing successful practice in managing independent learning, modelling, questioning and self- and peer-assessment.

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

Susan Bowles
Her Majesty's Inspector