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Mr M J Murphy
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Murphy

Ofsted 2010–11 best practice study: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visits on 21 May and 13 October 2010 to look at work in English.

The visits provided valuable information which will contribute to our publication about best practice in English. The publication will include case studies about individual providers. If your school is included as a case study, you will have an opportunity to comment before publication. Individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: discussions with senior managers, teachers and students; observation of five lessons on each of my visits; a review of departmental documents; and scrutiny of students' work.

Features of good practice

- Careful curriculum management underpins lesson planning and teaching to give well-targeted support for students across a wide ability range.
- Lessons are planned in detail to meet students' individual needs. These plans are clearly structured, ensuring that students know what they are intended to learn, and they are led through a progressive sequence of activities to help them meet personal and group targets.
- Other strengths of teaching observed included secure subject knowledge, a very good rapport between teachers and students, and some excellent practice in differentiation.
- The English department has reviewed its Key Stage 3 curriculum effectively to extend students' opportunities to explore poetry and to study

complete texts, to experiment with creative and narrative writing, and to develop more independent learning. This has worked well. Students enjoy having a novel at the centre of each term's English programme. The department's choice of texts has successfully engaged the interest of those not immediately attracted to reading and made clear connections with issues that strike students as relevant and worth thinking about. Topics and techniques presented in the leading novel for each unit are explored further through a broad range of stimulus texts.

- Sixth-form students have much greater responsibility for their own learning and this benefits their A-level work.
- The department has developed a very productive link with Greenwich University. A-level students work in pairs with Greenwich postgraduates on a seminar basis, each student researching and leading discussion of a theme or text.
- Subject leadership is highly focused and well organised, with high expectations of students' achievement.

Area for development

- Planning less tightly structured lessons to allow more scope for students to take the initiative, extending their independent learning and creativity.

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

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector