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Mrs J Herriman
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Herriman

Ofsted 2010–11 best practice study: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visits on 13 July and 26 November 2010 to look at work in English.

The visit 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 prior to publication. Individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: observation of one lesson; scrutiny of documentation; and meetings with you, senior staff, key English staff and groups of students.

Features of good practice observed

- There is a very clear understanding of the subject and how to make it interesting and engaging for students. The subject leader and staff are committed to continuing improvement, ensuring that practice is reviewed and refined to meet new requirements and to sustain success.
- Leadership in the subject sets a clear vision for improvement based on high expectations. Good-quality subject documentation, supported by effective systems and structures, enables teachers to be very clear about what is expected of them. There is a rigorous and regular process of monitoring and evaluation of provision. This leads to accurate identification of priorities for improvement and an effective action plan.

- There is a strong emphasis on improving learning and teaching with a very effective culture of modelling effective approaches and sharing resources. The subject leader has developed teaching across the team to engage students' interest and to use assessment well to review their progress.
- There is a strong focus on developing the skills of leaders across the subject and improving teachers' confidence in delivering a range of courses, including those in the sixth form. The English team have provided training and guidance to teachers across other subjects and their practice has been instrumental in whole-school initiatives.
- Schemes of work are detailed and linked well to assessment foci. They contain comprehensive lesson plans and a good range of resources to support teachers in their planning. They are increasingly adapted to stimulate students' interests and to reflect the differing attainment of classes.
- The curriculum provides flexible opportunities for students to take GCSE English early. This contributes strongly to increased motivation and rising standards, for example at grades A* and A. The school uses the flexibility to regroup classes and to tailor programmes more closely to each student's needs to improve achievement.
- There is a developing focus on literacy skills in other subjects, raising the profile of reading and encouraging teachers to prompt students to use skills learnt in English in their subjects.
- Students speak highly of the quality of relationships in English lessons and the willingness of teachers to provide additional help and support. This takes the form of assistance in class, through marking and feedback, by e-mailing key presentations and information, and through extra sessions with coursework or examination practice.
- Effective strategies to gain students' interest, assessment approaches in lessons, and activities to secure learning have been shared not just within the subject team but across the staff, including the provision of 'top tips' and individual coaching.

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