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Mr P Tolson
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Dear Mr Tolson

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during the visit on 26 and 27 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is satisfactory.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is satisfactory.

- Attainment is below average on entry. Progress in Key Stage 3 has been slow in the recent past, but achievement by the end of Year 11 is in line with expectations. Those with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar progress to their peers in the school.
- Results in GCSE English are below average. Boys' attainment is lower than girls' and the difference is larger than found nationally.
- In GCSE English Literature, for which a large majority of students are entered, the gender gap has been narrowed, so that both boys and girls have recently attained in line with the national average.
- Progress is improving. The quality of learning observed in lessons was at least satisfactory and sometimes good. Sampled written work indicates satisfactory progress over time. Based on teachers' assessments, the great

majority of students in both key stages are currently on track for suitably challenging targets.

- Students generally enjoy English, because lessons are varied and interesting. However, some students, particularly boys, find writing difficult, and their written work is not always well developed or presented.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory, with some good features.

- The teaching observed was at least satisfactory and showed several good, and occasionally outstanding, qualities. Teachers' enthusiasm for their subject enlivened lessons. Warm relationships encouraged all students to have a go and persist with challenges.
- Good examples were seen of collaborative and exploratory activities which give students valuable experience of speaking and listening. Skilful modelling and questioning deepened students' understanding. Classroom technology was used effectively but teaching assistants were not always actively involved in supporting learning.
- Planning for lessons is detailed but does not always identify clearly the short- or medium-term learning objectives. Opportunities were sometimes missed to challenge students and to clarify their understanding of how to do well. Expectations for writing were sometimes limited and some opportunities were missed to develop students' stamina and concentration for writing.
- Marking gives useful guidance, and some teachers skilfully involve students in understanding their targets and evaluating their learning.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The curriculum in English is satisfactory, with good features.

- The range and variety of work in English help students make progress in reading, writing and speaking and listening. Younger students are encouraged to read more widely and independently. Older students are prepared for GCSE in drama or media studies as well as English and English literature. Extra support is provided for those with weak literacy and to prepare for examinations.
- As the department refreshes schemes of work, some distinctive features are emerging. Students are enjoying the fiction and drama texts they are reading, particularly when visits or role-play enrich the experience. However, the expectations for students' learning are not always clear or pitched at a suitably high level.
- Writing tasks are being given a clearer purpose and linked to the world beyond school. For example, both boys and girls in Key Stage 3 are enjoying opportunities to be news reporters or detectives, to write stories for young children and create digital texts collaboratively. A sharper focus on developing literacy skills has been incorporated in schemes and the use of media technology is being emphasised.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are satisfactory.

- The talented and enthusiastic teaching team is well regarded in the school and contributes to developing improvements in teaching.
- There is recognition of what needs to improve further in English. Broadly accurate self-evaluation has informed a relevant plan for improvement which is being implemented steadily. Students' progress is being more rigorously monitored and interventions put in place where needed.
- Under experienced team leadership, teachers are refreshing and enriching the curriculum. Teachers share practical ideas and take advantage of opportunities for professional development. These developments are producing early signs of better engagement and progress by students, although outcomes have not yet improved.
- Subject documentation sets out the aims of English, broadly outlines schemes of work and enables teachers to understand policies. It is, however, less clear about strategies for improving achievement and raising standards in writing.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising attainment in English, particularly on the part of boys and in writing
- improving teaching through higher expectations of students' capability and clearer identification of planned learning in individual lessons.

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