

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr T Clark
Headteacher
Spalding High School
Stonegate
Spalding
Lincolnshire
PE11 2PJ

Dear Mr Clark

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 1 and 2 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 six complete lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is good with some outstanding features.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is outstanding.

- Attainment is very high at the end of Key Stage 4. GCSE English Language results dipped slightly in 2010, with a reduced proportion of A and A* grades. However, results in English Literature improved substantially and around two thirds of students achieved A or A* grades.
- Progress is good overall although the data suggest some variability. However, the proportion of students who made the expected progress in 2010 across Key Stages 2 to 4 was very high and many students did even better than that. Performance in GCSE English Literature was especially strong.
- Attainment in A-level courses has been broadly average, although with a dip in A2 results last year. Results have tended to be stronger at AS level, with improved performance in 2010.

- Students are very keen to learn and their behaviour is exemplary. They are confident, articulate and show a real curiosity for learning. They are interested in ideas and often 'go the extra mile' in responding to teachers' demands. They work well together and exercise responsibility in a mature fashion.
- Attainment on entry to the school is very high, especially in reading. However, more than half the students arrive with standards in writing that are broadly average.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- Students enjoy English. They praise their teachers' enthusiasm and knowledge. They say that teachers make their lessons enjoyable and give them opportunities to express their views and argue their opinions. They believe that teachers are caring and help them to improve their work
- The teaching observed was consistently good. Relationships were very strong. Because students are highly motivated, some teachers employed potentially innovative approaches that gave them some responsibility in managing their learning. This worked well. Lessons were enjoyable, paced and provided students with good opportunities for small group work. Teachers showed good subject knowledge, especially of literary texts, and this helped to engage students with a range of challenging texts.
- At times, lessons appeared to be planned around lively tasks rather than learning outcomes. This meant that teachers missed opportunities to consolidate or reinforce learning as the lesson developed. In one or two places, effective modelling of writing by teachers would have improved students' outcomes.
- Assessment is good. Students are clear about the level they have achieved and have detailed understanding of the assessment criteria at all stages. Most work is marked in substantial detail and provides positive feedback to students. However, teachers do not always identify effectively enough the weaknesses in students' work or the next steps in their development; this applies especially for the most able students, including some in the sixth form.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The curriculum in English is good, with some outstanding features.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced, with particular emphasis on reading and literary texts. All students are entered for GCSE English Literature. The department has a well-planned and systematic approach to promoting and extending reading for pleasure across Key Stage 3.
- Some aspects of enrichment are outstanding, especially the extent to which some students are encouraged to take responsibility and exercise leadership. This includes students' involvement in the online quarterly newspaper, the English club and paired reading schemes. The school also

provides reading groups, a spelling club, and numerous opportunities for individual students to enter writing and poetry competitions.

- Other strengths of the curriculum include some good transition work with Year 6 pupils when they visit before enrolling, such as the use of a reading passport, and good provision for extended writing across the school.
- The department is reviewing its programme for Key Stage 3. Discussion with students suggests that their experience of English differs from class to class. The programme is not yet clear enough about the core elements of an English course to be followed by all students or how progression is to be enhanced throughout the Key Stage. Issues for the department to consider include: the balance of literary and non-literary work, the contribution of moving-image texts, and how to respond to lower standards of writing on entry to the school.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are good.

- There has been a good response from the subject leader and her department to weaker performance last year in GCSE English and A-level English Literature. They have identified the issues and put in place appropriate courses of action. The capacity for further improvement is good. Teachers are highly committed and keen to improve. They respond well to advice.
- The monitoring of students' progress is detailed and systematic. The department has used a good range of strategies in recent years to review performance. This includes lesson observation by subject teachers, learning 'walks' by senior leaders, work scrutiny, and feedback from students. This enables the school to be broadly accurate in its subject self-evaluation. However, this evidence does not yet contribute clearly enough to a departmental view about how to enhance teaching and learning further. There is much good practice already in the department although the current arrangements for timetabled departmental meetings do not easily enable this to be shared.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving students' achievement in English in the sixth form
- extending the Key Stage 3 scheme of work to ensure that it identifies the key experiences and skills for all students as they move from Year 7 to Year 9.

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

Philip Jarrett
Her Majesty's Inspector