

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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Miss V Evans
Headteacher
Walsall Academy
Lichfield Road
Bloxwich
Walsall
WS3 3LX

Dear Miss Evans

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 14 and 15 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 parts of eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is satisfactory.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is satisfactory.

- By the end of Year 11, students' attainment is broadly average. In 2010, GCSE results were broadly average in English Literature and below average in English. In 2011, Year 11 students have already exceeded the proportion who achieved grade C or better last year. The gap between the attainment of boys and girls is narrower than that found nationally.
- Students make satisfactory progress and the trend is improving. In 2010, students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those from minority ethnic backgrounds made better progress than their peers.
- English is a popular subject in the sixth form. Students' attainment is broadly average and improving and they make satisfactory progress.

- In the lessons observed, students made satisfactory and sometimes good progress. They settled to work well, especially where teachers encouraged discussion or set practical tasks. They collaborated well, talking enthusiastically in pairs or groups, although in some lessons the same students tended to volunteer answers to questions.

Quality of teaching in English

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

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons thoroughly with clear objectives for learning. They set specific expectations for students of differing abilities but do not always follow this up with tasks or resources designed to enable students to achieve those different outcomes. Teachers use a good range of activities and establish good relationships to ensure that students maintain interest over the three-hour lessons. Most lessons are managed well and conducted at an appropriate pace.
- In the best lessons, teachers use questions well to involve a range of students and to challenge them to think carefully and to justify their ideas. However, in other lessons, teachers do not provide opportunities for all students to participate or they accept brief and undeveloped answers.
- Students know their target and current level or grade. They value teachers' comments on their work and receive detailed targets at the end of modules. Teachers mark students' books regularly but the quality of their comments varies considerably with some providing precise targets while others comment too generally or focus on effort and presentation.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced with an equivalent focus on reading, writing, speaking and listening. The curriculum is under review and new units, some in conjunction with subjects such as dance, are being developed. Students enter GCSE English early. This strategy has already improved results in 2011. An increasing range of specific approaches helps to improve students' literacy, including one-to-one coaching, small group work and twilight sessions.
- Schemes of work are detailed and linked closely to key objectives. Teachers use modern technology effectively to structure lessons and present a range of media such as film, audio and visual stimuli.
- There is an increasing range of enrichment activities which students appreciate. These activities include theatre and other trips, a visiting poet, competitions and events.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are good.

- The recently appointed subject leader has established a clear vision for the subject and set high expectations for students' achievement and the quality of provision. In a short time, through rigorous review of performance, he has identified key priorities for improvement. Many of the strategies in the detailed action plan have already been implemented. For example, as a result of greater focus on completing coursework, Year 11 GCSE results are already above those of 2010.
- The subject leader's evaluation of provision is accurate. He has a good understanding of the quality of teaching through regular observation of lessons. A succinct and relevant handbook, supported by very detailed schemes of work, provides effective guidance to assist teachers with planning lessons and teaching.
- Subject staff have discrete roles and responsibilities which have recently been renegotiated to use teachers' expertise and provide a change of perspective.
- The subject leader has brought about improvements in the curriculum and achievement for GCSE and in the sixth form. English now has a higher profile in the academy, enhanced by the expansion of enrichment opportunities, and this matches the positive views expressed by students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- further improving students' progress by ensuring that all teachers:
 - match tasks and resources closely to students' differing abilities
 - use a wide range of questioning strategies to involve students of all abilities in answering and to extend their thinking and ability to explain their ideas
 - identify clearly in their marking how students may improve their work.

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.

Yours sincerely

Martin Cragg
Her Majesty's Inspector