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4 March 2011

Mr M Lee  
Headteacher  
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College  
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Dear Mr Lee

### **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 15 and 16 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 11 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

### **Achievement in English**

Achievement in English is good.

- Attainment in GCSE English is average and rising rapidly. It is above average in Advanced level English Literature and slightly above average in other courses offered in the sixth form.
- The school has acted very effectively to raise achievement from the doldrums. The GCSE results already attained by the great majority of the current Year 11 indicate good progress. The proportion of top grades has increased. Nearly a third of Year 11 students have already made an impressive four levels of progress from the age of 11.
- Rigorous assessment by teachers indicates that students in Key Stage 3 are broadly on track to reach the challenging targets set.

- The gap between boys' and girls' attainment is wide when they enter the school, but is steadily shrinking. Adjustments to the curriculum and teaching approaches have ensured that boys' GCSE results are currently at least as good as girls'.
- The quality of learning and students' current progress are generally good. Most students understand what they need to do to make progress, participate enthusiastically when lessons are active, and work independently with concentration.
- English lessons are popular but there is some variation from class to class in the pace of learning and students' active engagement. Younger students say that they enjoy the variety of purposeful activities they experience in many classrooms. Most are stimulated by the classic and contemporary texts they encounter, because these are made relevant to their experiences. The school has stirred students' interest in wider independent reading. Many enjoy the opportunities to write for compelling or creative purposes and competitions to improve their language skills.

### **Quality of teaching in English**

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- A key good quality is the breadth and depth of subject knowledge in the large subject team. Accurate assessment is used well to plan for the full range of needs. Teachers give lessons a clear direction by explaining learning goals and provide constructive support, guidance and feedback.
- Teachers have high expectations and use effective strategies to enable students to reach them. Relationships are warm and, in the good and outstanding lessons seen, teachers led learning with impressive expertise and enthusiasm. For example, well-focused activities challenged students to think independently; difficulties with concepts and processes were anticipated effectively and teachers modelled clearly, making good use of modern technology; and skilful questioning explored students' tentative responses in ways which deepened everybody's understanding.
- However, teachers' skills in using such strategies varies. In satisfactory lessons, questioning by teachers checked students' knowledge, but did not always probe and develop their understanding. As a result, teachers sometimes missed opportunities to inject challenge.

### **Quality of the curriculum in English**

The quality of the curriculum in English is outstanding.

- The curriculum has recently been fundamentally redesigned. A coherent overall plan provides very good balance and progression in reading, writing and speaking and listening, across all three key stages. This is illustrated by the challenging variety of reading, including Shakespeare's plays, poetry and media texts, that is incorporated from Year 7 onwards. The refreshed curriculum is distinctive, imaginative and well planned to fit

a wide range of needs. It is beginning to show a clearly positive effect on students' attitudes and achievement.

- Each unit of work provides a stimulating mix of experiences. Learning plans clearly outline the focus for teaching and assessment and suggest imaginative approaches to secure progress. Within this framework, teachers are encouraged to be creative and innovative.
- Productive links are being made, so that, for example, Year 8 classes encounter poetry of the First World War as they study the period in history lessons. Younger students are responding well to realistic contexts for communication, such as making presentations to their previous schools.
- A good range of enrichments aims to involve a wide range of students. As well as performances and visits to theatre, a public speaking competition and book club, the department has developed an effective reading challenge scheme.
- In addition to English GCSE for all, options for Year 10 now include GCSE in English Literature, drama, media studies and Level 2 functional skills. These lead well to a choice of post-16 qualifications. Adjustments to groupings, extra support and mentoring cater effectively for students' different rates of progress in Key Stage 4.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in English**

Leadership and management in English are outstanding.

- The leadership and management team is dynamic and passionately committed to improving outcomes for all students. Their clear understanding of the subject and well-informed views on how to teach it have given English a strong sense of direction.
- Very rigorous monitoring by senior and subject leaders evaluates a wide range of information, including the progress and attitudes of different groups of students. The clear action plan pinpoints areas needing to improve, and is being implemented rapidly and thoroughly. Responsibilities are shared well. Although improvements are fairly recent, they are solidly built and indicate a strong capacity to improve further.
- Staff are encouraged to show initiative and held to account for their students' progress. Their work and contribution to whole-school improvement is well regarded. The refreshed curriculum reflects the contributions of the talented team. Members meet regularly to review progress and share good practice. Some have worked in pairs to develop new approaches. More recently qualified teachers are well supported.
- As a result, there is growing understanding of agreed approaches across the team. Good management has ensured consistency in key respects, such as teachers' planning and marking. However, there remains some variation in the effectiveness with which teachers lead learning.

**Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- raising attainment in English, by improving the consistency of teaching through sharing existing successful practice in leading learning.

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**