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Mr I Carter
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Carter

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 16 and 17 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 nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is outstanding.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is outstanding.

- Attainment has consistently been well above national averages. In 2010, all students gained A* to C grades in GCSE English Language, with over half achieving A* or A grades. In English Literature, 97% gained grade C or higher, with over one third achieving A* or A.
- Students' progress is good although recent achievement in English has been affected by staffing issues, now resolved. The proportion of those students for whom English is not their first language is growing quickly. With exceptionally well-managed support from English staff and EAL designated support staff, all these students make excellent progress.

- Attainment in the sixth form is above average. Results in 2010 were especially high in A-level English Literature, with three quarters gaining A or B grades.
- Students are ambitious and responsive. They work hard, with evident enjoyment. The most able respond with imagination and authority when asked to take the lead in discussion and role play.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is outstanding.

- Almost all the teaching observed was at least good and much was outstanding. Key strengths included: a productive rapport with students; persuasively communicated subject knowledge; well-judged planning; effective assessment; confident use of technology; and encouragement of independent learning.
- On occasion, a teacher's overlong explanation or excessive time given to a single activity slowed the pace of learning. While most group and pair work was well managed, sometimes over-assertive students inhibited the contributions of others.
- Marking of written work is thorough and combines praise with specific guidance on how to improve.
- Teachers are well-qualified enthusiasts, keen to enhance their knowledge and skills. They are steadily improving students' writing skills across the school and beyond. Engagement in a major project for the International Boys' Schools Coalition, led by the school's cross-curricular literacy coordinator, has heightened students' awareness of the stretch and power of English.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is outstanding.

- The department has responded with flair to the ending of national tests in Year 9. It has developed a literature-rich curriculum, with embedded language support. Additional literacy lessons very successfully meet the needs of less skilled students and those for whom English is not their first language. Topics and texts engage the boys' interest, prompt them to read for pleasure and encourage their creative writing.
- Sixth-form options cater very successfully for students' different interests. Many with science and/or mathematics as their main focus choose English Language in the sixth form to enhance their communication skills. Media studies students value their subject's practical and creative elements as a useful complement to more theoretical subjects. English Literature students describe themselves as avid readers who love the subject.
- Clubs and activities, such as debating and creative writing, are very popular and significantly enhance students' skills. Cross-curricular and inter-school projects, theatre visits and writers' workshops are well managed to support the mainstream curriculum. Reading is presented as

exciting, status-enhancing and fun through activities such as the 'Extreme Reading Challenge' that involves fathers and sons reading together in exotic or adventurous situations.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are outstanding.

- Strongly supported by the senior leadership team, the head of department presents an ambitious vision for English, which he ensures is put into practice. There is impressive clarity and coherence in the planning and monitoring of teaching and learning. Innovation and creativity are encouraged. Particular strengths lie in the inclusiveness, flexibility and liveliness of the curriculum and in the opportunities created for teachers to take on responsibility and to develop their knowledge and skills within the school, nationally and internationally.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that pace and time-management in lessons maintain the momentum of learning
- managing group and pair work so that all students actively participate.

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

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector