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Mr E P Robinson
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Dear Mr Robinson

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 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 nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is good.

- Standards are above average at the end of Key Stage 4. Attainment is above average in GCSE English Language. Over the last two years, the proportion of students gaining an A* to C grade at GCSE has been broadly average whereas the proportion gaining A* or A grade has been significantly above average. Attainment in GCSE English Literature is high. This is a significant achievement as all students are entered for the examination. In both English Language and Literature, the proportion gaining the highest grades has increased over the last three years.
- Attainment on entry to the school is above average in English. In the last two years students made satisfactory progress in English Language and good progress in English Literature. Progress was in part affected by long-

term staff absence, which has now been significantly reduced, and some inconsistency in the quality of teaching. School data indicate that Year 11 students are on track to make better progress in 2011.

- The good culture of learning in most classrooms successfully promotes students' independence and encourages thinking and the open sharing of responses.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- Most teaching is good or outstanding. A few lessons observed were satisfactory. In the good lessons, objectives were sharply focused on the skills to be learnt and planning was detailed and imaginative. Creative use was made of visual and other resources and students were engaged well in thoughtful reflection and exploration of their ideas. The use of drama techniques in English is highly effective and a distinctive feature of the outstanding teaching. Satisfactory teaching lacks coherent, detailed planning and sufficient challenge.
- Assessment criteria are used well to direct the learning. Marking regularly provides specific praise and guidance. Students are well informed about how to improve their language skills. Peer- and self-assessment are used effectively. On occasion, marking does not provide enough constructive feedback.
- Visual resources, including the interactive whiteboard, are used well to enable students to understand and analyse texts. This was seen to great effect in a class where almost half the students were Polish. The teacher illustrated key phrases with high-quality images and written translations of many words were provided in Polish. These enabled all students to maintain a good pace of learning and encouraged bilingual students to read and speak in English.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- The curriculum is well organised and promotes a clear philosophy and a consistent and practical approach to teaching, learning and assessment. The new Key Stage 4 scheme of work provides a clear and detailed framework for the new GCSE requirements, including the controlled conditions assessment. The Key Stage 3 curriculum provides a systematic focus on skills in English with regular assessment in each term and year group. Schemes of work outline a clear framework for learning to progress from one year to the next. Plans give comprehensive but flexible guidance for teaching units of work.
- Creativity is a significant strength of the curriculum. Imaginative cross-curricular links are planned with a range of other departments, for example to make sports commentaries and write and perform protest songs. Video cameras are used for storytelling and presenting ideas.

Home-learning tasks give students good opportunities to make their own choices and manage their own learning.

- Extra-curricular activities, such as visits to the theatre and the film club, enrich the study of literature and the media. Role-plays of court cases provide a challenging and enjoyable way of developing the speaking and listening skills of the gifted and talented students.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are good.

- The head of department's strong commitment and clear vision has led to improvements in the curriculum, teaching and assessment. Teamwork is good and other members of the department have contributed well to these developments. The department is well led and organised, although aspects of teaching remain inconsistent.
- Professional development has been used effectively to improve and standardise the use of assessment and to promote the use of creativity in teaching and learning. Effective support has been provided to tackle weaknesses in teaching. Formal and informal lesson observations are used frequently to monitor the quality of teaching. The department meets frequently to review the teaching of specific skills and to share good practice.
- Leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the department. Analysis of school performance is thorough but departmental evaluation of students' progress data lacks detail and sharpness. Ambitious expectations of progress have been set by the school but measurable departmental targets for improvement are not highlighted clearly enough. Self-evaluation judgements are not sufficiently well linked to the evidence of impact on students' progress and attainment.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising attainment and progress by:
 - increasing the proportion of students that gain an A* to C grade in English Language
 - ensuring that the quality of teaching and use of assessment are consistently good
 - improving the rigour of data analysis in self-evaluation.

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

Bernard Campbell
Her Majesty's Inspector