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Mr R Haring
Principal
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Dear Mr Haring

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 March 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 seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is outstanding.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is outstanding.

- Students enter the college with attainment that is broadly average. By the end of Year 11, they make outstanding progress and their attainment is high. All groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make at least good progress and there is little variation between groups. Attainment in speaking and listening is higher than in reading and writing, though all are high when compared with national averages.
- Progress in the sixth form is more varied with a few students achieving grades below their capabilities. Nevertheless, the large majority make good or exceptional progress so that progress is good overall.
- Behaviour and attitudes to learning are exemplary. Students have full confidence in their teachers and speak warmly about the individual attention and care that they receive.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is outstanding.

- Teaching observed was consistently at least good and often had outstanding features. The overall impact of teaching on learning is outstanding. Lessons contain a superb variety of tasks and activities which is firmly linked to learning objectives. Resources are used excellently to support the students in their learning.
- Teachers' subject knowledge, enthusiasm and commitment are all excellent. Students are confident in their learning and often inspired by the teaching.
- High achievement in speaking and listening provides a springboard for further improvement in reading and writing. For example, in a Year 11 lesson, students were considering how to choose poems to answer questions on particular themes in GCSE examinations. The oral tasks enabled them to make informed choices and to recognise that particular poems could be used for different themes. Discussion promoted excellent progress in their understanding and their ability to express this orally and in writing.
- Assessment is rigorous, accurate and regular. It provides students and teachers with clear information about what has been achieved and the next steps to take to improve achievement.
- When teaching is good rather than outstanding, the pace of lessons slows because tasks, such as oral group work, continue for too long. Lessons also tend to be planned so that they are delivered to the whole class without ensuring that the more able are provided with further challenge and the less able with targeted support.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is outstanding.

- Students speak enthusiastically about the variety, breadth and interest of the curriculum.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and provides all students with the opportunity to make outstanding progress. Schemes of work are detailed and imaginative, providing an excellent foundation for learning.
- Schemes of work are carefully designed to ensure full coverage of a wide range of material, including traditional and contemporary literature, media texts and opportunities for drama. They ensure that topics and activities are designed to promote progression in essential skills and are meticulously linked to the excellent arrangements for assessment.
- An excellent range of trips and of visits to the school by writers ensures that the students have a rich experience of English.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are outstanding.

- This large department of 17 teachers is excellently led by the subject leader who is ably supported by a committed and effective leadership team with responsibility for the different key stages.
- Monitoring and evaluation are rigorous, regular and accurate, leading the department to strive constantly to make further improvements. Leaders have established a common sense of purpose and ambition which ensures that teachers work consistently well, showing individual flair and imagination in their teaching while following commonly shared and robust procedures.
- High attainment and excellent progress, coupled with significant improvements in targeted areas like speaking and listening, demonstrate an excellent capacity to improve.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving provision in the sixth form so that the achievement of students matches that found in the rest of the school
- making sure that all lessons are as brisk and challenging as the best in the school and that lesson planning takes more account of the needs of different students.

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

Andrew Harrett
Her Majesty's Inspector