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Mr K Moody
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Dear Mr Moody

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 24 and 25 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is outstanding.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is outstanding.

- Attainment is high at the end of Key Stage 4 and has been consistently rising. In the past two years, almost 100% of students gained grade C or above in the GCSE examinations in English Language and English Literature. The proportion of students who have achieved A or A* grades is well above average. The school's assessment and work seen during the visit suggest that current attainment is also well above average. In the sixth form, students reach above average attainment overall, but in English Language and English Literature courses, results are closer to national levels than they are at GCSE and there are fewer high grades.
- Contextual value-added data suggest that after a significant leap forward from previous years, progress slowed a little last year due to a slight fall in higher grades obtained in GCSE. This has been addressed through stimulating and challenging lessons which fully involve students in

understanding how to reach the highest levels. Overall, students' current progress is outstanding from age 11 to 16 and good in the sixth form.

- While students enter with above average standards of speaking and listening and reading, their writing is less well developed.
- A small group of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is helped to make equally outstanding progress by the very clear teaching and assessment.
- Sixth-form students make good progress. They say that they feel inspired by their teachers' passion for the subject and the guidance they receive. In writing seen, they apply with accuracy technical terms of linguistic analysis and literary criticism in their studies. However, in lessons, while all follow the clear lead given by the teacher, some students are more passive or restrained in exploring their insights and articulating their individual opinions.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is outstanding.

- Teachers' collegiate approach has developed imaginative, well-constructed approaches, particularly for classes in Key Stages 3 and 4. As a result, students are well equipped to analyse or be inspired by a wide variety of texts. The quality and clarity of guidance in lessons and marking are exceptional and fully involve students in understanding what they should strive to achieve and how well they have done it.
- Students are engaged in lessons through the active approach to learning, the support from assessment and the imaginative tasks set. Students often work in groups, sometimes using physical resources such as cards to experiment with word order, or they agree helpful structures to follow before embarking with confidence on their own writing or analysis. A Year 9 boy said that he had thought writing a diary would be, '*a bit girly*,' but had found himself totally absorbed by being allowed to set it in the future, casting himself as Prime Minister in the scenario of a developing war.
- A notable feature of teaching is how often mnemonics of learnt techniques, or practical guides with exemplifications that students have made themselves, structure what they do. Teachers place great emphasis on the benefit of planning.
- While students in sixth form are not so familiar with these techniques, they are beginning to apply them. For example, a class studying a novel made group displays of relevant notes to a key passage so that all were involved in sharing and reinforcing views.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is outstanding.

- Classroom doors painted as covers of Penguin paperbacks announce the department's infectious passion for reading. Students study both good-quality contemporary fiction and a very good range of poetry and of pre-

1914 literature. They encounter a stimulating range of non-literary texts, for example, looking analytically at the informal immediacy of Jamie Oliver's writing. Year 7 students study parts of *The Canterbury Tales* then write their own modern versions, some of which they read aloud on a coach trip to Canterbury.

- Advanced level English Language and Literature courses are very popular and account together for the highest proportion of the school's A level entries. Analysis, research, essay writing and presentation skills equip students well for higher education. Other courses are offered in media, theatre and film. A 'pre-University' course in Literature in Year 12 ensures that all students will complete two full years of study, rather than some leaving after AS exams.
- Enrichment and extension are well established for older students. During the inspection, sixth-form students were on stage rehearsing *Lady Windermere's Fan*, the latest play in a long tradition of performance. Recently, the involvement of younger students in extra-curricular events has increased with visits from authors and a joint project with the sixth form making a film about school life for the next intake. A first-rate team of journalists from all years produces a regular school magazine and learns from contact with professionals.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are outstanding.

- The head of department has made a major contribution in harnessing the subject knowledge and creativity of her team to develop schemes of work and approaches to assessment and planning that greatly benefit students. The enthusiasm and teamwork are professionally stimulating for all its members. Although leadership is at a point of transition, a high-value legacy is secure.
- Rejection of any complacency in a context of high achievement is reflected in the success of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and by the thorough monitoring of progress of Year 10 and Year 11 cohorts in response to the slight reduction in higher grade GCSEs last year.
- Senior management in the school knows and supports the department well. High standards are required and delivered in teaching, supported by lesson observation that is thorough and accurate.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- adapting the highly successful approaches to supporting students' confidence and planning in Years 7 to 11, to sixth form students to gain increased proportions of the highest grades at A level.

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

Tony Byrne
Additional Inspector