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Mr P Binding
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Binding

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 2 and 3 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 parts of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is good.

- Attainment in English has been above average over the last three years as measured by the proportion of students attaining at least a C grade in GCSE English language. Standards in English literature at the end of Key Stage 4 are below the national average but almost all students in Year 11 are entered for the examination regardless of their ability. The proportion of students achieving the highest possible grades is below average in both English language and literature.
- Progress from Key Stages 2 to 4, as measured by the contextual value-added measures, has been good over the last three years. Students join the school at the start of Year 7 having achieved a level of attainment in English broadly in line with the national average. Most groups of students make good progress but the progress of higher attaining students is not as high as other groups.

- Standards in lessons seen were above average and progress was good. The school's data suggest that current Year 11 students are on course to reach standards above the national average by the end of Key Stage 4, having achieved broadly average standards on entry to the school in Year 7.
- Almost all the students spoken to said that they enjoy their learning in English. They have a strong love of reading. Students in Key Stage 3 especially appreciate the opportunity for individual reading in every English lesson.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- Most of the lessons seen were either good or outstanding. Relationships between teachers and students are very good and students commended their teachers for giving freely of their time to support them at lunchtimes and after school.
- Students have numerous opportunities for independent research, group work and presentations. In the most effective lessons, they are given the chance to make choices in group work and delegate roles and responsibilities.
- Although work is planned with objectives for different groups of students, there is insufficient focus on challenging higher attaining students to aspire to the more demanding work. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities respond well to the challenges they are set.
- Most students know their current level or grade in English and the grade they are aiming for. While much of the marking is good and, at its best exemplary, at times it is limited to brief praise comments and students are less clear about how they can improve from the written feedback they receive.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- The school has responded well to the growing numbers of students who now enter Year 7 with very low reading and spelling ages. They are taught in transition classes that mix a phonics-based programme well with the study of literature. Students also benefit from one-to-one catch-up programmes.
- Students respond well to the opportunities for reading in lessons and through extensive use of the library and they diligently complete their reading records. This does not continue into Year 10, however. Students benefit from a range of clubs including Bookworms, creative writing, film and poetry clubs. There is a rich programme of English events, trips and visitors to the school.

- The school is working well in partnership with a local college to provide teachers for an A-level English course based at the school. Some of its own students have been able to take up this course.
- A very high proportion of the students have been identified as being gifted and talented in English. They are then included on the special educational needs register for school action. However, with so many students on the register, provision for higher attaining students is limited.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are good.

- Although new to the school, the head of department is an experienced leader. Self-evaluation is accurate in identifying strengths and weaknesses still to be addressed, such as a greater rigour in data analysis and accuracy of challenge and predicted grades for higher attaining students. There is an accurate view of the quality of teaching within the department.
- Senior leaders manage English well and through a regular cycle of meetings have established an effective structure for monitoring and evaluating the performance of the English department.
- Leaders have demonstrated their positive impact through the good GCSE results in English language and a high level of examination entry for literature. A love of reading has been fostered in students throughout the school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising the proportion of students achieving the highest possible grades in English by:
 - targeting additional support for gifted and talented students in English more efficiently and effectively
 - consistently challenging higher attaining students to take on the more demanding learning objectives set in lessons
 - providing regular feedback to students so that they have a clear idea of how to achieve the highest possible grades.

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

Mark Sims
Her Majesty's Inspector