

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



12 April 2011

Ms J Capewell
Acting Principal
Sidmouth College
Primley Road
Sidmouth
Devon
EX10 9LG

Dear Ms Capewell

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 28 and 29 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 10 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is satisfactory.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is satisfactory.

- Attainment is above average at the end of Key Stage 4. However, the proportion of high grades is small, particularly for boys. Results in English Literature are higher than in English language. Results in the sixth form at A level are broadly average, but few high grades at A* or A are obtained.
- Contextual value-added data suggest that students make expected progress. The school's assessment and work observed demonstrate that effective steps are being taken to minimise the small number of students not currently making expected progress and results are on a rising trend. Progress in sixth-form courses is satisfactory.
- Students enter with a broad range of abilities in English; their speaking and listening skills are better developed than their writing skills. Most can read competently for their age, but their ability to analyse stylistic effect is less well developed. Progress is good in Key Stage 3 as a result of radical

reforms to schemes of work and effective strategies to motivate students. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are taught in small groups where close attention and support are given, so they make good progress. The ethos of challenge to work independently and meet high expectations is spreading to lessons in Key Stage 4 where, for example, striking visual images displayed in a lesson led students working in small groups to achieve high-quality analysis of impact.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory.

- Teaching is improving as a result of recent management action. Improvement was demonstrated in that the majority of lessons observed were judged to be good or outstanding, although some inconsistencies in quality remained.
- At the core of the best lessons is students' intensive engagement as they respond to interesting materials and compete against themselves or classmates to improve to the next, clearly delineated level. In a Year 7 lesson, students were 'banned' from writing sentences typical for their age and, with guidelines to follow, many reached well above that standard.
- Effective target-setting for high-ability students and reading demanding texts are leading to better progress. Two students in Year 9 were inspired by *Under Milk Wood* to write vivid descriptions of Sidmouth at night and of a Devonshire meadow. Approaches taken are improving students' capability to gain high grades.
- All lessons now start with clear learning outcomes. Criteria for success are available for students' reference. However, in satisfactory lessons, teachers do not always adhere to planned timings and the main task is delayed too long. Teachers do not make it clear how to progress from one level to the next. Sometimes, group work is not arranged to good effect, or the teacher relies solely on the same pairing arrangement, reducing access to a range of ideas.
- Learning was variable in the sixth-form lessons observed. Year 12 students showed passion and empathy in their response to poetry from the First World War, but their analysis of how the poets used language to produce these effects was not clear and hence they were insecure in comparing two poems. A few Year 13 students did not show enthusiasm for the authors studied and the class's response in a lesson was muted, with most of the ideas coming from the teacher.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- The curriculum has been overhauled thoroughly to provide a wide range of experiences closely aligned to particular skills and levels, and designed to develop progressively. Students encounter a wide range of reading in different genres and interpret texts and images from non-literary sources,

media and advertising. Almost all respond with interest and value the quality of the experience offered. Older students say that they appreciate the changes the department has made.

- Recent changes in provision of additional time and staffing are improving students' progress at all levels of ability, including those who have some difficulties in literacy.
- Importance is given to strategies which prepare students well to be confident about their writing. Across the department, good use is made of discussion groups, whiteboards for capturing first thoughts, planning and drafting.
- English makes worthwhile contributions to enriching the curriculum and, recently, the department persuaded all subject teachers to join in celebrating World Book Day to make a school-wide statement about the pleasure of reading.
- The sixth-form curriculum has not received as much attention. The teachers working in this area have appropriate subject expertise but students have not always been thoroughly prepared for the transition from Key Stage 4 and for the skills of critical analysis demanded. The department is attending to this need.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are good.

- The head of department leads by good example which has inspired her whole team of teachers and support assistants to strive to implement new policies and strategies. Senior leaders and managers have given effective support in timetabling and resources.
- Her subject evaluation on appointment accurately identified key priorities such as improvement in student motivation and behaviour, achieving more passes at grade C and above in GCSE, and faster progress in Key Stage 3. These priorities are being addressed well.
- Use of data to monitor progress is very good. Target-setting is exemplary because analysis of assessment data identifies students who are ready for greater challenge as well as helping those who are working below their expected levels.
- Action to improve teaching has ensured that lessons are at least satisfactory and often good. There is consistent use of objective setting, reference to assessment criteria, and a move to more active groupwork which is improving learning. This demonstrates good capacity for improvement.
- An innovative partnership with teachers from other schools is developing the ability of subject staff to reflect on and improve their own practice.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the proportion of students gaining high grades at GCSE

- improving sixth-form students' grasp of close textual analysis
- implementing consistency across the department in planning, assessment and the management of group work.

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