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Mr S Collier
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Dear Mr Collier

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 16 and 17 May 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 good.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is good.

- There is an improving trend in attainment and early entry GCSE results indicate a further improvement in 2011. At the end of Key Stage 4, attainment in English Language is above average. Almost all Year 11 students take English Literature and attainment is average.
- Students enter the school at the beginning of Year 9 and, by the end of Year 9, teacher assessment indicates that they make good progress from average levels at the end of Key Stage 2. At Key Stage 4, over the last three years, both boys and girls consistently made significantly better than expected progress. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress in English.
- Over the last three years, A-level students made satisfactory progress and gained broadly average results. There is rising trend in the AS results. In 2010, students on the AS English Literature course made good progress

and a high proportion gained the top grades. Coursework assessment indicates improved performance by the current Years 12 and 13.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- Most observed teaching was good although some was outstanding. In the better lessons, teachers use their enthusiasm and expertise to motivate and challenge students to extend their use of language. The teacher moves fluently and energetically from one task to another by commenting on and extending the learning. All observed lessons provided a good range of resources and practical activities. On occasion, teaching is too focused on the task or the assessment and this limits the engagement of students. At times, it would be helpful for teachers to diverge from their plan to develop a particular point to consolidate or extend learning.
- The teaching of speaking and listening is good. Teachers use their positive relationships with students to promote their confidence in speaking to an audience. Activities are well planned to develop specific skills. Imaginative use is made of video cameras to show examples and to give feedback.
- The quality of marking is good in all years. Students regularly receive praise and detailed and constructive comments on how to improve. Assessment criteria are used well to formulate the objectives for lessons and to review what has been learnt.
- In the sixth form, students are stretched and challenged to extend their use of language and terminology to convey their analysis with greater accuracy and sophistication. Assessment criteria are used effectively and focus sharply on areas for development.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is good

- Curriculum plans provide a strong framework for teaching and learning. Units of work are planned in detail. Moreover, there is an alternative version for each unit that has been adjusted to meet the differing needs of the higher and lower sets. The use of media technology is a strong feature of the curriculum and students have regular opportunities to use drama. Planning for the new GCSE course is thorough with a well-organised calendar of lessons and controlled assessments.
- Early entry has been used effectively to increase students' success at GCSE. The increased use of setting and additional staffing has enabled teaching to more effectively target the needs of students at different levels of ability. Care has been taken to review the use of texts and tasks to ensure that they motivate both boys and girls. Additional catch-up activities, run by all members of the department, enable students to improve their coursework and literacy skills. They also have opportunities to work with authors and to visit the theatre.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is good

- The new subject leader and his team work collaboratively and effectively to plan the curriculum and review teaching. The department regularly shares good practice and trainee teachers are well supported in their development. Improvement plans have clear priorities and are directly focused on impact. Actions to implement improvements to the curriculum have been effective. The analysis of GCSE data is detailed and self-evaluation is accurate.
- In the sixth form, effective action has been taken to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Revised coursework tasks, a stronger focus on examination skills and the use of more active approaches to teaching and learning have contributed to improving outcomes. However, the school lacks clear comparative measures of the progress of current students to show how much outcomes are improving.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that students consistently make good progress in the sixth form and that the progress of current students is measured more rigorously.

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