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Miss C Pope  
Headteacher  
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Dear Miss Pope

### **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 7 and 8 June 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 inadequate.

### **Achievement in English**

Achievement in English is inadequate.

- Attainment in English at the end of Year 11 has been low and progress has declined in recent years, with too few students reaching the standards of which they are capable. Attainment and progress in speaking and listening are higher than in reading and writing.
- Lesson observations, scrutiny of students' work and current data show that the attainment of the current Year 11 has improved and that these students are making better progress than in previous years. However, significant weaknesses persist in some aspects of English, particularly in writing. Students do not make enough progress in all aspects of the subject at Key Stage 3. Consequently, there is insufficient evidence of rapid or sustained improvement across the school.

- Students' attitudes towards the subject vary. Some say they enjoy English, particularly valuing the opportunities to express their opinions in discussion and in writing. However, others lack confidence in their writing and say that they are not sure how to improve their work. This variability of response reflects inconsistencies in teaching.

### **Quality of teaching in English**

The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory.

- Although the majority of teaching observed during the visit was at least satisfactory, and some of it was good, the overall quality is too inconsistent to ensure secure and rapid improvement across all year groups.
- In the good teaching seen, students were engaged in purposeful discussion which was clearly linked to learning objectives. Teachers' good subject knowledge was used well to ensure that work was pitched at the right level. Work was linked carefully to the students' previous learning. In the best practice, activities were tailored to cater for different groups of students. Relationships in these lessons were good because students had confidence in the teaching and were engaged in their learning.
- In some lessons observed, expectations were too low. Weak subject knowledge sometimes led to unchallenging tasks. Occasionally, teachers talked for too long before students started their work and interrupted them to give unnecessary instructions or clarifications, which students reported in discussion to be a common frustration. Activities continued for too long and lacked a clear focus. In such lessons, students sometimes became bored and dispirited. Lack of clear purpose and the slow pace of learning in these lessons led to progress that was satisfactory at best.
- Assessment at Key Stage 4 has improved, enabling teachers to target particular skills and students, thus raising standards. At this level, marking is focused clearly on what has been achieved and how work can be improved. Although assessment is satisfactory overall, the assessment of some written work at Key Stage 3 is inadequate. Some students reported that their books are marked infrequently and some books showed evidence of long periods without assessment. Poor presentation sometimes goes unchecked. Where marking is regular, it often does not point out precisely what has been achieved and the next steps students should take to improve their learning. Consequently, progress stalls and planning is hindered.

### **Quality of the curriculum in English**

The quality of the curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced, meeting requirements and providing opportunities for a range of tasks across reading, writing, speaking and listening. However, there is insufficient attention at Key Stage 3 on identifying clearly enough the skills to be taught within

different units of work and how the curriculum will ensure progression in writing.

- Although the curriculum is enriched by some trips, activities and visits to the school, these are insufficiently integrated into the normal routines of teaching to provide memorable experiences for all students.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in English**

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is satisfactory.

- Focused intervention by the subject leader, working effectively with senior leaders and subject teachers, has raised achievement this year at Key Stage 4. Success in this area demonstrates satisfactory capacity to improve achievement further in English across the school.
- Monitoring and evaluation lack clarity and regularity, especially across Key Stage 3, leading to inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and in the frequency and effectiveness of assessment. Department plans lack clear timescales and measurable objectives. Teachers do not meet regularly on a formal basis.
- Although there is some professional development for staff, there are insufficient opportunities to ensure that teachers keep pace with initiatives in English and to support the development of consistent teaching in the subject.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- improving the quality of teaching by:
  - ensuring that the pace and challenge of work appropriately engage students in their learning
  - regularly using assessment information to tailor work to the requirements of all students and to provide clear feedback about strengths and areas for development
- improving progression in writing by:
  - ensuring that assessment points out precisely what students have achieved in writing and the particular areas that they need to improve
  - identifying more effectively the writing skills to be taught within individual schemes of work, particularly at Key Stage 3
- ensuring that leaders and managers:
  - devise a rigorous cycle of monitoring and evaluation throughout the year
  - produce a detailed improvement plan that is focused on raising achievement in all year groups and includes measurable targets

- provide more opportunities for teachers, including non-specialists, to share good practice and keep pace with developments in the subject.

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**