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30 June 2011

Mr M Browne
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Dear Mr Browne

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 11 and 12 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 parts of eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is satisfactory.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is satisfactory and improving.

- In 2010, the attainment of Year 11 students improved and was broadly average. Students made satisfactory progress from their starting points, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The school's assessment information for current Year 11 students indicates that they are on track to improve on the 2010 results, especially in the proportion achieving GCSE grades A* and A.
- In the sixth form, results in English courses are broadly average. Students make slightly better progress in English Language than in English Literature where it is satisfactory.
- In lessons, students behave well and settle to work promptly. They enjoy discussions in pairs and small groups, although they are not always confident in expressing their views to the rest of the class. They assess

their own work and that of other students regularly and say that this helps them to understand how they can improve.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory with good features.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons thoroughly with clear learning objectives. Although they make clear the criteria by which students will know they are successful, the work set and materials used are not always matched closely enough to students' differing abilities to ensure that they are suitably challenged or supported.
- Students enjoy working in pairs and small groups to discuss texts and develop their ideas. In the best lessons, teachers use questions well to prompt students to explain and justify these ideas and to build their confidence orally. However, this is not yet the case in all lessons.
- Students know their target level or grade and receive regular updates on the current quality of their work. They appreciate teachers' detailed comments on how they can improve their work further. The system for sharing criteria for assessments with students is effective. Students in all years have a good understanding of what they are being assessed on and use this information well when preparing work.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is satisfactory with good features.

- The curriculum is broad and covers the main text types including media, non fiction and poetry. The English team has worked hard to develop detailed and comprehensive schemes of work at Key Stage 3 and for the new GCSE courses. Students have a good balance of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Units are of varying duration and all have common assessment tasks to evaluate students' progress.
- Recent changes to the curriculum have expanded the overall time available for English and provided additional flexibility at Key Stage 4 to tailor courses more closely to students' needs.
- Well-organised intervention programmes provide effective support to students of differing abilities across the school. The recent 10-week one-to-one tuition programme has enabled most of the 50 Key Stage 3 students involved to improve their level of achievement in reading and writing.
- English is a popular subject in the sixth form with both English Language and Literature offered. Students appreciate opportunities to see live theatre and enter debating competitions. However, the range of enrichment activities in the rest of the school is more limited.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is satisfactory and improving.

- The subject leader has established a clear vision for English and has led considerable change in the last two years. English staff work well as a team and effective shared leadership has introduced comprehensive schemes of work, rigorous assessment systems and greater consistency across the subject.
- Thorough analysis of students' performance and regular monitoring of provision have enabled the identification of relevant priorities for improvement which are documented in a well-focused plan. The implementation of activities in the plan, such as the intervention programme, is contributing to the improving trend in achievement.
- Staff monitor students' attainment and progress regularly. The analysis is used effectively to identify students who need additional support and to refine improvement plans each term.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising standards further by improving the consistency with which teachers:
 - match work and materials closely to students' differing abilities
 - ensure that pair and group work is effective in developing students' ideas and their confidence to express them
 - provide more opportunities for students to experience English in contexts outside the school and through subject-related visitors.

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

Martin Cragg
Her Majesty's Inspector