

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



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Mr L Conley
Headteacher
St Joseph's RC High School and Sports College
Chorley New Road
Horwich
Bolton
BL6 6HW

Dear Mr Conley

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 22 and 23 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 good.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is good.

- Attainment in English has risen substantially over the last three years. In 2008, GCSE results were average but for the following two years they were significantly above average. The proportion of grades at A* and A has risen from below to above average. School assessments suggest that this trend of improvement is likely to continue in 2011.
- Attainment in GCSE English Literature has been significantly above average. However, in 2010, English Literature students did not do as well as they did in their other subjects. With the provision of an additional course, attainment is on track to rise in 2011.
- The rate of progress made by students has accelerated rapidly over recent years and was good in 2010. Year 11 students are likely to make good progress again this year. Students make good progress across all years, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The few

students eligible for free school meals also make good progress and their attainment is above average. The department has successfully targeted higher ability students. However, more students are capable of achieving the top grades at both key stages.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- The culture of teaching and learning promotes outstanding behaviour by boys and girls of all abilities. This enables students to work continuously, cooperatively and with good concentration.
- In the best lessons observed, the sequence of tasks was very well-structured and built constructively on prior learning. The use of drama and role play successfully extended students' reading of fiction. The sharp focus on specific uses of written or spoken language enabled students to understand and apply the skills needed to succeed. This was supported by stimulating use of film, well-explained tasks and clear models to follow. On occasion, lessons were too dominated by teacher talk and opportunities were missed to extend the use of talk and role play to develop students' thinking and confidence.
- Marking consistently provides praise and specific comments on what to improve. On occasion, recommendations for improvement are restricted to presentational issues. Teachers use peer- and self-assessment regularly and effectively. This enables students to receive valuable feedback from each other and deepens their understanding of how to succeed. Occasionally, the explanation of assessment criteria at the beginning of the lesson is too lengthy or formal.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- At Key Stage 3, revised schemes of work communicate a consistent philosophy of learning, an effective framework for using assessment to develop skills, and clear guidance on how to make learning active. At Key Stage 4, the new GCSE courses and controlled assessment have been implemented well. The choice of GCSE courses has been adjusted to better meet the range of students' needs. The programme of additional support in Year 11 has been re-focused effectively so that underachievement by students of all abilities has been tackled, instead of just those on the grade C/D borderline.
- At both key stages, students have regular opportunities to use drama, read poetry and work on media texts. There are occasional opportunities to meet with writers or visit the theatre and there is a successful debating club.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is outstanding.

- The subject leader has brought about a significant improvement in achievement. She has high expectations of staff and students and an ambitious vision of what can be achieved. The quality of teaching has improved as a result of clear guidelines about lesson planning and the use of assessment.
- Effective systems for monitoring the quality of teaching and evaluating strengths and weaknesses have established new ways of working and greater consistency of practice. Evaluation draws effectively on students' views and the evidence from their books. Cycles of planning and review rigorously identify strengths and areas for development. These are building a reflective culture of continuous improvement. Students' progress is regularly reviewed at Key Stage 4 and effective actions are taken. Systems for reviewing students' progress at Key Stage 3 are at an early stage of development. Other members of the department are beginning to take on more responsibility for aspects of improvement.
- The subject leader is challenged and supported well by the additional leader in English shared between four partner schools. This has enhanced leadership and staff development and accelerated the pace of change in the department.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the proportion of students that gain A* and A grades by:
 - increasing the proportion of outstanding teaching
 - monitoring students' progress at Key Stage 3 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