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Mrs J F Elliott  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Elliott

### **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 27 and 28 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 eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is satisfactory.

### **Achievement in English**

Achievement in English is satisfactory.

- Standards are below average in English when students join Year 7 and results in GCSE English remain low by the end of Year 11. The proportion of students attaining grade C or higher has fluctuated but is currently increasing. Attainment in GCSE English Literature, which is taken by about two thirds of the students, is average.
- There are no major differences in the progress made by the various groups of students. However, students with low-to-middle prior attainment and those who start with higher levels tend to make less progress than others.
- Over time, students' rate of progress has been in line with the national picture, although it was lower in 2010. A concerted drive has restored progress to a satisfactory level this year. This is reflected in better results

from the GCSE examinations students have already taken, the quality of work and the school's assessments.

- Students' feel positive about English and appreciate the support given by their teachers. Most cooperate well in lessons. When challenged and given responsibility, they show enthusiasm and apply themselves well.

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

The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory.

- Teachers engage students by using a variety of short, practical tasks and resources including modern technology to illustrate concepts and model new skills. Warm and supportive relationships encourage students to persist with their work.
- The best teaching seen was marked by good use of assessment and well-structured planning which ensured strong pace and challenge and engaged all students in the class.
- Weaknesses which limited students' progress included: tasks which were not clearly explained or were too easy for some students, but too difficult for others; questioning which did not involve all students or probe understanding well enough; and activities which were not structured effectively to promote high-quality talk or writing.
- Marking has become more consistent as a result of a drive to ensure that teachers regularly inform students about what they have achieved and how to do better. Evidence that students act on this guidance is patchy. Feedback in lessons at best pushes for higher performance, but is too often bland. Students are sometimes involved in assessing their progress but the quality of their response varies.

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

The quality of the curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- Students have a reasonably balanced experience of English and a typical range of examination options, including media studies and English literature at GCSE.
- Extra teaching, including residential and weekend events, has helped more students to reach their targets. Relentless examination preparation has, however, limited the enjoyment of English for some.
- Schemes of work for Key Stage 3 have been updated. Students in Years 7 and 8 describe an interesting variety of texts and opportunities to work independently and creatively. Functional literacy and some learning and thinking skills have been well integrated. Schemes have been adapted successfully to meet the needs of different teaching groups. As a result, the sampled work of lower and higher prior attainers shows solid progress.
- Teachers are encouraged to incorporate drama, structured talk and sustained independent writing in their plans, although inspection evidence suggests that practice varies.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is satisfactory.

- The subject leader has an ambitious vision for the subject, but realising it has proved difficult. This is partly because of instability in the teaching team but also because monitoring and guidance within the department have not been fully effective.
- Self-evaluation is accurate. Students' progress is now checked carefully and interventions have kept more of them on track for their targets this year. Teachers work together on refreshing the curriculum and are open to learning from others. As a result, there are signs of improving achievement across the age range. However, the drive and the systems to embed higher expectations largely come from the school's senior leaders, with specialist support from the local authority.
- From September 2011, the department will be at full strength, with a new subject leader and an advanced skills teacher. However, it will continue to require additional support until new roles are established and effective.

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

- raising attainment and improving the achievement of all students, in particular the low-to-middle and higher prior attaining students
- ensuring that students have good opportunities for structured talk and sustained independent writing
- embedding higher expectations for English teaching through clearer guidance, opportunities for teachers to learn from good practice and effective monitoring by subject as well as school leaders.

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

**Susan Bowles**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**