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Mr M Berry  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Berry

### **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 14 and 15 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 10 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is outstanding.

### **Achievement in English**

Achievement in English is good.

- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is broadly average but improving. Above average numbers of students achieve grades C or above at GCSE English; this represents good progress given the starting points on entry to the school for many of these students. A below average proportion of students reaches the higher grades A\* or A; this also reflects their attainment on entry, especially at level 5.
- The department enters most students for GCSE English literature. Although results slipped last year, this policy enables a majority of students to achieve a good, second GCSE qualification in English.
- There are contradictions in the progress data available. For example, contextual value-added data suggest that progress in English in recent years has been satisfactory. However, well above average numbers of students make the expected rates of progress from Years 7 to 11 and this

figure has risen year-on-year. Other measures to monitor students' achievement suggest that all groups make good or better progress. Overall, progress is good. There are particular strengths in the written work of many students.

- Attitudes to learning are very good. Students are invariably well behaved and want to do well. They work supportively together in small groups and enjoy sharing ideas. Students enjoy reading but often lack higher-order reading skills and this limits their understanding of more complex texts.

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

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- Teaching in lessons observed was good overall although there is some variability in quality across the department. Strengths include: very positive relationships; effective use by teachers of a wide range of resources and interactive tasks; well-directed support offered by classroom assistants; effective differentiated materials in the most successful lessons; and good management of class discussions.
- Where lessons were less successful, learning objectives lacked clarity or were over-ambitious. In addition, in some lessons teachers tended to plan for activities rather than outcomes in learning.
- Students enjoy English lessons and speak positively about their teaching. They enjoy the variety in lessons, the range of lively tasks, and the positive ethos that enables them to express their ideas confidently.
- Assessment is very strong. A clear departmental policy ensures consistent approaches. Assessed pieces of work, across reading, writing, speaking and listening, are well planned and involve clear criteria, opportunities for students' self-assessment, and good feedback through explicit targets for improvement. The marking of students' day-to-day work is mostly of high quality also, with detailed feedback and constructive points for improvement. Students say that they find the marking very helpful.

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

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

- The curriculum is well planned at all key stages. There is clear guidance for teachers through detailed long- and medium-term plans, supported by a range of resources and practical ideas.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. There are strengths in the use of drama across all classes and information and communication technology, including the use of media technology. Some innovative work has taken place involving some of the newer technologies such as students podcasting. Visualisers are also being used very well used to support the teaching of writing.
- The department shows considerable commitment to extending students' experience and enjoyment of reading. Independent reading takes place

systematically across Key Stage 3 and this involves much discussion about books, sharing ideas and individual recommendations by teachers. This is welcomed by students who appreciate teachers' enthusiasm for reading.

- Assessment is well integrated into schemes of work across both key stages. The Key Stage 3 programme is based around half-termly units in each year which build in progression of learning in areas such as poetry and media study. Some students comment on a slow pace of learning at times within units and a degree of repetition.
- There is a good range of enrichment activities, including some innovative events such as the recent BBC Shakespeare-by-heart project. Some experiences are very well directed at particular groups of students, such as the outward bound residential for boys that involved writing and poetry, and a reading group for more able and keen readers. Good support is also provided for students who need extra help with English outside lessons.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is outstanding.

- There is a strong sense of vision to work in English, based around principles such as the value of mixed-ability grouping, the importance of reading, and learning through sharing ideas. Senior leaders are passionate about the subject and highly committed. Expectations are very high. They have been effective in raising standards in English over recent years.
- The English team works very well together. Younger teachers are given good support and encouraged to contribute to the development of the department. Teachers work closely together and share ideas. Delegation is effective. The awarding of bursaries has enabled some young teachers to lead whole-school development in key areas. The department is highly regarded within the school and works well with other schools in the local authority.
- Self-evaluation is detailed and accurate. The bi-annual subject review provides a thorough evaluation of the department's work. Students' views are regularly sought and a considerable programme of moderation and standardisation ensures the consistent application of assessment criteria.
- The department is clear about areas for further improvement. These are well represented in the action plan although greater involvement of the head of department in lesson observations would enable her to sharpen its analysis of how to improve teaching further. Students' progress is rigorously monitored leading to effective intervention, where needed.

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

- improving the consistency of teaching across the department by increasing the proportion of lessons that are good or outstanding.

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

**Philip Jarrett**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**