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24 June 2011

Mr P Swan  
The Principal  
Beacon Community College  
East Beeches Road  
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Dear Mr Swan

### **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 13 and 14 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 five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is satisfactory.

### **Achievement in English**

Achievement in English is satisfactory.

- Attainment is broadly in line with national averages and is improving. In 2010, 73% of students gained grade C or above for English GCSE, exceeding the college's target. While only two thirds of the cohort took GCSE English Literature, a greater proportion of those gained grade C or above than when almost all students were entered. In both English and English Literature, relatively few students gained A\* or A grades. The department recognises the need to ensure that able students are more consistently challenged.
- Boys progress more slowly than girls and have lower attainment. The gender gap is being tackled through choice of texts and topics and intervention groups, with improvement evident in books and folders. Boys contribute effectively to discussion and group work.

- Almost all students entered for AS Language and Literature in 2010 met or exceeded their targets. However, of those taking AS English Literature, three quarters did not attain their target grade in one particular unit. This has been attributed to the time spent on coursework rather than on preparation for the examinations and action has been taken to adjust the balance. The pass rate for AS courses was 100%.
- Staffing difficulties contributed to relatively poor performance in some aspects of the A level Language and Literature course. Greater rigour and consistency have been established this year. Two thirds of those taking A-level English Literature in 2010 met or exceeded their targets.

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

The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory.

- As students remark, much teaching is engaging and effective but the overall quality is uneven. The good or outstanding practice displays: strong and enthusiastic subject knowledge; well-structured planning that supports different learning styles; carefully managed opportunities to assess and reinforce progress; productive questioning skills; a positive rapport with students; lively pace; and effective use of varied resources.
- In less effective lessons: opportunities are missed to challenge able students to be more creative and independent; group work is dominated by one or two assertive students; and guidance given to students assessing their own and each other's work is not sufficiently clear.
- The quality of marking is uneven. The best consistently presents challenge as well as encouragement and has a perceptible impact on students' learning. Less effective marking does not offer clear guidance on how students can improve and there is little evidence of impact. Time is not regularly given for students to respond to assessment of their work.

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

The quality of the curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- In Key Stage 3, topics and texts are successfully engaging boys as well as girls, encouraging them to read and write more enthusiastically. The most successful units make good use of activities such as drama, film-making and group work. Towards the end of Year 9, students begin work on a GCSE text and complete a formal assessment. This successfully maintains their motivation and momentum.
- Analysis of results has prompted effective adjustments to the curriculum in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.
- In all key stages, what and how students are to learn are determined by what is to be assessed at GCSE, AS and A level. This has contributed to improved attainment but, on occasion, inhibits experiment and originality.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is good.

- The department has responded effectively to the whole-school focus on clarity and consistency in teaching and assessment. The assistant principal is overseeing strategies to raise expectations and attainment, with perceptible impact. He works well with the head of department, who has an accurate and carefully documented grasp of strengths and areas for development. Information about progress and attainment is now systematically recorded and analysed to set appropriate targets, to inform planning and to shape the programme for continuing professional development. This has helped to raise standards. The department's capacity for further improvement is good.
- The subject leaders recognise the need to combine rigour and consistency with more creative approaches. At present, there is too little opportunity for the whole department to share ideas and explore options together.
- The department is thorough in its monitoring of progress and ensures that students are aware of their current levels and personal targets.

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

- ensuring that the focus on assessing students' attainment and skills does not inhibit scope for creative approaches to learning
- making time for students to reflect on and respond to questions raised and advice given in the marking of their work
- creating opportunities for the department to share good practice in creative and challenging approaches to teaching and learning.

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

**Patricia Metham**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**