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Mr K Dean
Head of Federation
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Dear Mr Dean

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 20 and 21 September 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is satisfactory.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is satisfactory.

- The attainment of students in Year 11 has improved steadily over the last few years although it remains below average. The school is awaiting the outcome of the remarking of some Year 11 English papers for 2011. However, the provisional results from examinations taken in the summer by Year 10 students indicate that the upward trend is continuing. The school's assessment information indicates that students' attainment is broadly average at the end of Year 9.
- Students make satisfactory progress between Year 7 and Year 11 although progress is better in Years 9 and 10. The subject leader's close analysis of this assessment information leads to effective intervention for those students who are not on track to reach their target.

- Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar progress to all students, as do those who speak English as an additional language. Overall, boys do less well than girls in relation to performance nationally, but Year 11 classes have been reorganised recently to focus on this problem.
- In lessons, students make satisfactory and often good progress. They settle to work promptly and work well together in pairs and small groups. Many are eager to answer teachers' questions. However, a minority lack confidence in their ideas and are reluctant to volunteer answers. They are often too dependent, seeking help from the teacher before starting work.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory and improving.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons thoroughly, expecting different outcomes for students of differing abilities. They use a wide range of activities including regular pair and group work. However, tasks are not always matched carefully enough to the different expectations set for students.
- Teachers have worked hard to make lesson planning more consistent but there is still some variation in the pace of lessons. In the best lessons, teachers use a good range of questions to challenge students at different levels and to probe for explanations. They also select some students to ensure that all participate. However, some teachers rely too heavily on volunteers and do not engage more reluctant students.
- Teachers mark students' work in detail and provide relevant targets for improvement. Students know their target grades and levels but they are less clear exactly how they can improve their work and rarely correct or practise improving errors which teachers have highlighted.

Quality of the curriculum in English

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

- The curriculum is suitably broad and balanced with sufficient coverage of poetry, media, speaking and listening. Schemes of work are clear with comprehensive lesson plans and well-chosen assessment tasks. Recently, the English team has developed new units for GCSE and successfully revised some Key Stage 3 units to catch students' interest. Nevertheless, students are less positive about work in Key Stage 3 than at GCSE.
- Students start their GCSE course in Year 9, working to take their English examination at the end of Year 10. Students value this change. They also appreciate the regrouping which follows in Year 11 to focus on particular grade targets.
- Students benefit from a wide range of additional support and intervention, especially in Key Stage 4. There are good enrichment opportunities including visiting authors and a project with a BBC news team as well as

events marking Dickens and the Titanic anniversaries. Students also enjoy book clubs and a new reading challenge with an Olympic theme.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is satisfactory with good features.

- The subject leader is enthusiastic and provides an ambitious vision, strongly focused on achievement. The English team works together well, sharing development tasks and contributing to planning.
- The subject leader's rigorous analysis of students' performance informs a relevant action plan which identifies accurate areas for improvement. She has a clear understanding of the quality of teaching. The team makes good use of the school's coaching programme, for example in developing lesson planning. Teachers' practice is now more consistent.
- Systems for assessing students and monitoring their progress are thorough. Students' attainment and progress have improved steadily over the last few years as a result of well-chosen changes to curriculum and teaching. The department's capacity to improve further is good.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising students' attainment further, especially at Key Stage 4, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - adjust activities to match the different learning outcomes expected of students in lesson plans
 - use questions effectively to challenge the full range of students, building their confidence and independence
 - help students to understand exactly how to improve their work in line with the comments and targets set for them in marking
- developing further the curriculum at Key Stage 3 to engage students' interest and to provide them with practical and creative learning opportunities.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop English in the school.

As 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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Martin Cragg
Her Majesty's Inspector