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Mr R Bryant
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Dear Mr Bryant

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 10 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is good.

- Students' attainment is average by the end of Key Stage 4 and they make good progress. Attainment and rates of progress increased in 2011 and the school's detailed and accurate monitoring system indicate that these improvements are set to continue. Attainment at A level is broadly average and students have made satisfactory progress over time. However, their current progress is good.
- The vast majority of students have positive attitudes and engage well in English lessons. They enjoy learning together in paired or group activities, as noted in a Year 11 lesson where students extended their analysis of character by exploring together the language Shakespeare used.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- Teachers plan lessons well and, in the best lessons, students are actively engaged in their own learning. In these lessons, teachers challenge students through targeted questioning, enabling them to share their ideas with the whole class and expecting them to explain their answers. Where learning is less effective, lessons lack a high degree of challenge, particularly for those students predicted to achieve above the average.
- Resources are used well to engage, motivate and stimulate students' thinking. For example, in a Year 9 lesson, the text chosen engaged students' interest and helped them to understand how different forms of punctuation can influence a reader's mood. Opportunities for students to use information and communication technology as part of their learning are planned for well across the years.
- Students mostly know what they need to do to improve and good-quality feedback was observed during lessons. There is some inconsistency in the extent to which written comments clearly set out the next steps for students.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- The curriculum provides a balance of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Good-quality texts are used across the key stages which help to support students' engagement and their literary development. Adaptations have been made to the curriculum, for example by introducing GCSE Media Studies to Year 9 for the most able students and giving others an opportunity to work towards their GCSE qualification across three years. The curriculum at Key Stage 5 is varied and challenging.
- Leaders have identified the curriculum as an area for development, and the inspection findings support this. Currently, schemes of work, particularly at Key Stage 3, are detailed and have a good focus on learning and skills development. However, the progression of skills between units and across year groups is not securely established.
- Students are positive about their experience of English and many particularly enjoy the project-based work that has been introduced. Enrichment experiences exist in each key stage, for example short-story competitions and workshops for some of the most able. There are, however, fewer opportunities for all groups of students to benefit from a wider curriculum offer, for example by first-hand experience of live theatre or meeting with writers.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is good.

- A clear and purposeful vision for improvement has been established as a result of good collaborative working and a willingness to adapt quickly when needed. Subject leadership, including that of the acting Director of Learning for English, has no tolerance for complacency. The subject is exceptionally well supported by the senior leadership team.
- Self-evaluation is thorough and accurate and is then transferred into suitable plans for improvement. The school's systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching are precise and have had a good impact on raising standards of teaching and learning. For example, there is a desire for more teaching to be outstanding and appointments have been made to the team to support this.
- Leaders have responded well to the previous whole-school inspection findings and, as a result, students' use of formal language is improving across the curriculum. This was confirmed in their appropriate use of Standard English in lessons observed.
- There is good capacity for improvement. Leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of the subject well and have good plans in place to support these. The quality of teaching is improving, and the learning and progress of students have increased and are set to continue to do so.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the proportion of good and outstanding teaching and learning by:
 - maximising the level of challenge for all groups of students
 - consistently providing students with high-quality, developmental feedback on their written work
- enhancing the quality of the curriculum by:
 - ensuring the progression of skills is planned for within and across key stages
 - planning more opportunities to enrich students' experience of the wider English curriculum.

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.

Yours sincerely

James McNeillie
Her Majesty's Inspector