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13 October 2011

Mr R Coles
Principal
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Dear Mr Coles

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 4 and 5 October 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.

- Students' attainment by the end of Year 11 is above average, although results declined slightly in 2011. Students perform better in GCSE English Language than in English Literature, where attainment is broadly average.
- Students make satisfactory progress from their starting points. Year 11 students in 2011 did not quite reach the challenging targets set for them, especially those who only just achieved Level 4 in Year 6. Students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress.
- In lessons, students make generally satisfactory and sometimes good progress. They mostly settle to work promptly and work well in pairs or groups. However, a small minority do not listen closely enough at times and do not always apply themselves persistently in written tasks. Most

students offer relevant and extended answers to teachers' questions but some lack confidence both in reading aloud and expressing their views.

- Attainment on English courses in the sixth form is above average and students make good progress.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory with good features.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge which they use particularly effectively in the sixth form. They plan lessons thoroughly, using a sound range of activities, but objectives for learning are not always precise enough. They set out clear criteria for success linked to different expectations of students but the work that follows is not always matched closely enough to students' differing abilities.
- Teachers form good relationships with students in lessons. In the best examples, this encourages active discussion and engages students' interest.
- In the best lessons, teachers maintain a strong focus on the learning objectives and set a good pace, ensuring that students of all abilities are challenged. However, this is not consistent across all lessons.
- Teachers mark students' work in detail and provide clear targets for improvement. The marking of work in the sixth form is particularly well focused and helpful.
- Teachers use a good range of questions to check students' understanding and, in the best examples, probe for deeper responses and promote debate and discussion.

Quality of the curriculum in English

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

- The curriculum is broad, meets syllabus requirements and covers the main range of texts and genres. Almost all students complete both GCSE English Language and English Literature. Students value the two distinct courses which are offered in the sixth form and they are popular subject choices.
- Schemes of work are clear and well-organised with clear links to assessment tasks. Students receive useful summaries of course requirements and key deadlines. GCSE units have been chosen carefully to engage boys' interest and promote study of media and modern communications.
- In 2011, Year 10 students took part of their GCSE examinations early. Interventions with a small group of Year 11 students proved effective in helping them to raise their grades. Staff offer a sound range of enrichment activities including theatre trips and visiting writers.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is satisfactory and improving.

- The recently appointed subject leader is committed and has a clear vision for English. She has reviewed performance closely and uses effective analysis of examination results to identify accurately the key areas for improvement. This information is not yet sufficiently prioritised to inform action plans and ensure that they are effective in bringing about improvement.
- The subject leader monitors the quality of teaching and teachers' marking regularly, identifying relevant strengths and areas for improvement. Self-evaluation is generally accurate.
- Provision in the sixth form is good. Achievement at Key Stage 4 is more variable but attainment remains above average. The subject leader has already identified which groups of students need particular attention to improve performance and programmes are scheduled to start soon.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving students' progress in Key Stage 4 by:
 - developing specific strategies to support and challenge underperforming groups or individuals
 - enhancing students' concentration and building their confidence in expressing their views orally and in writing
- improving teaching by ensuring that all teachers:
 - set precise objectives for learning and match work closely to the differing abilities of students
 - maintain the pace of learning in lessons and challenge all students
- translating the clear and rigorous analysis of performance into prioritised and effective plans for action.

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