

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs S Bullen
Headteacher
Woolmer Hill School
Woolmer Hill Road
Haslemere
Surrey
GU27 1QB

Dear Mrs Bullen

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 28 and 29 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 outstanding.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is outstanding.

- Results in English and English Literature at the end of Key Stage 4 have been significantly higher than the national average for at least three years. This reflects the excellent progress made by all groups, including students known to be eligible for free school meals and those identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Boys progress as well as girls.
- The small number of students for whom English is not the first language also make excellent progress, benefiting from one-to-one tuition and from care taken to integrate and support them in mainstream classes.
- High expectations, meticulous monitoring of progress, and well-managed booster classes and enrichment activities ensure that students across the ability range meet and very often exceed expectations based on their Year

6 assessments. In GCSE English, the proportion of A* and A grades achieved in 2010 was significantly higher than the national average, and provisional results for 2011 point to a further increase.

- Students have an engagingly positive attitude to learning; they are keen to take full advantage of the opportunities provided and to meet their personal targets. They are articulate, responsive and mutually supportive. Many choose to continue with English beyond GCSE and the department's relationship with local colleges is very strong.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is outstanding.

- Students of all ages and abilities are emphatic that excellent teaching is the key to their success and their enjoyment. They appreciate the verve with which teachers share their knowledge and love of the subject. Other students agreed cheerfully when a Year 10 girl observed: 'They trick us into learning. It's fun and so it sticks in your mind.'
- Key strengths include: teachers' readiness to learn from experience, to share ideas and to be innovative; enterprising use by teachers and students of appropriate technology; teachers' effective questioning skills; their responsiveness to individual needs and learning styles; and their ability to make the subject relevant and engaging. The street brawl at the start of *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, came alive for students when set alongside television coverage of recent riots in English cities.
- Occasionally opportunities are missed in lessons to build on an unexpected response or suggestion from a student, which then limits scope for independent thinking.
- Work is carefully and regularly marked, balancing praise with specific guidance on how to improve. There is, however, little evidence of students reviewing pieces of work in the light of the teacher's comments and the impact of marking is not always clear.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is outstanding.

- The curriculum is extremely well planned and comprehensive. Students are encouraged to read widely and to develop an appreciation of language through the exploration of novels, drama and poetry, non-fiction and moving-image texts. Introducing a competitive element in Key Stage 3, with rewards, motivates even those not initially keen on reading. The library makes an important contribution here. Students respond enthusiastically to opportunities for creative writing, especially narratives, and find the wide range of text-based tasks both challenging and worthwhile.
- Staff and students have responded extremely positively to new GCSE specifications. Controlled assessment of coursework is proving especially helpful for boys. Year 9 provides a useful bridge to GCSE study, giving

students experience of speaking and listening assessments and preparation of texts for a formal writing assessment.

- The impressively varied enrichment programme is well supported by students. Public speaking and creative writing are particular strengths. Weekly activities, such as the journalists' club, are complemented by special events – for example, theatre trips and workshops - and by booster classes, revision sessions and summer schools.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is outstanding.

- Tirelessly committed, lively and persuasive line management gives teachers the confidence and the resources to be innovative while maintaining high expectations and preparing students successfully for formal assessments. Honest and robust evaluation of strengths and areas for development enables the department to respond quickly and well to changing syllabuses and the needs of different student groups.
- All members of this relatively small department make a valuable contribution to strategic planning and each other's professional development. Rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning complements regular and accurate assessment of students' progress and attainment.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- extending and embedding recent strategies to foster independent learning
- ensuring that time and encouragement are routinely given to students to reflect on and respond to the guidance given in marking of their work.

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

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector