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Mr P James
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Dear Mr James

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 28 and 29 September 2011 to look at work in English. Thank you also for welcoming my colleague, Philip Jarrett HMI, on the second day of the inspection.

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 eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is good.

- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 has improved over recent years, especially in 2010/11 when the percentage achieving A* to C grades in English language GCSE rose by 9% to 78% and in English literature GCSE from 85% to 95%, both being above national averages. However, the percentage of students achieving the higher A and A* grades dipped to below average in 2011. Attainment in Key Stage 3 is above average overall in reading, writing, speaking and listening.
- Students start at the Academy in Year 7 with attainment in English that is broadly average, although the Academy's assessments indicate that standards in writing are slightly below nationally expected levels. Students make good progress in both Key Stages 3 and 4. Over the past two years

the Academy has been particularly successful in accelerating the progress of boys and the achievement gap between boys and girls is rapidly narrowing as a result. The progress of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is also good and challenging targets have been exceeded.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- The teaching observed was mostly good and some was outstanding. Lessons are very well planned to take full account of the varying needs of students. In the best lessons, highly imaginative activities effectively motivate and engage students who show real enthusiasm in, and commitment to, their learning. Teachers' questioning provides effective challenges to students to extend and reflect widely on their learning. For example, in a lesson studying the poem *Nothing's Changed* by Tatamkhulu Afrika, students were highly motivated by incisive questioning and their understanding of the poem deepened as a result.
- In most lessons, the pace of learning is brisk with clear time limits and high expectations, so students make good progress as a result. Behaviour is consistently good and relationships are excellent because students are encouraged to improve and feel valued. Well-planned resources are used to support teaching and enhance students' learning. Teaching assistants are well-trained and therefore have a very positive impact on students' learning, especially those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Where teaching is less effective, too much teacher intervention slows the pace of students' learning.
- Accurate assessment and monitoring systems are being used effectively to identify students' progress and inform teaching. Marking is detailed and evaluative. Students are fully aware of their targets which are linked to clearly stated criteria. Teachers' written commentary provides helpful guidance to students on how they can improve their work. A strength is the emphasis that is placed on peer- and self-assessment which is effective in encouraging students to be reflective learners.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- The curriculum is well-planned to provide a good balance between reading, writing, speaking and listening. Modules have been designed well to meet the varying interests and abilities of students. Texts are chosen carefully to provide a good balance between modern and classical literature and the emphasis on encouraging boys' interest in reading is a strength.
- The structure and content of the curriculum are regularly reviewed and updated. Modules provide good opportunities to enhance cross-curricular links. This is exemplified by the link to history in a module based on the book *War Boy*. Literacy sessions are effective at encouraging students'

interest in wider reading and in improving their skills in spelling and grammar.

- The curriculum modules contain good opportunities for enrichment, and there are opportunities for some students to take part in activities outside the classroom, such as in public speaking competitions and the school play. However, the Academy recognises that students' enthusiasm for English would be further enhanced by a more structured approach to the provision of a wider range of challenging curriculum enrichment activities for all students.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is outstanding.

- Outstanding leadership and management effectively underpin the department's capacity for sustained improvement in English. The department works as a highly committed and collegiate team. Under the very effective leadership of the head of department and her deputy, there is a shared passion for English. A strong feature is the whole-team commitment to drive up improvement. This has resulted in an impressive increase in progress and attainment in recent years.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and based on a rigorous analysis of data and detailed and wide-ranging monitoring of teaching and learning. This is accurately informing improvement planning which identifies suitable priorities, sets challenging targets and details well-conceived actions to address them.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising the attainment of higher achieving students, especially in Key Stage 4
- strengthening the curriculum by providing a more structured provision of challenging curriculum enrichment activities.

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

Chris Nye
Her Majesty's Inspector