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Mrs S Young  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Young

### **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 22 and 23 November 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 satisfactory and improving.

- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 has been broadly average over recent years. There was a dip last year but current predictions for Year 10 and Year 11 students confirm higher standards. The proportion of students achieving the higher grades at GCSE improved in English Language. The gap between girls' and boys' attainment is in line with the national trend.
- Historically, progress has been satisfactory although many students are currently doing better than that. All groups of students, including students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make similar progress.
- Achievement in the sixth form is stronger in English Literature courses than in English Language. The department has changed its recruitment

policies and is seeking to improve teachers' subject knowledge for the Language course. Achievement across all courses has improved.

### **Quality of teaching in English**

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- Almost without exception, students speak very highly of their English teachers. They enjoy lessons and form very good relationships with teachers. Students behave well. They work well together in mixed groups and boys are often especially keen to contribute to discussions. Students appreciate the extra help that teachers give them outside lessons.
- Strengths of lessons included: a variety of active approaches that motivate students; use of a wide range of effective resources; good emphasis on individual targets for students and an understanding of assessment criteria; and an emphasis on developing speaking and listening skills.
- Learning was sometimes constrained by lesson objectives that lacked clarity and did not provide direction to the lesson. The pace was excessive at times and this reduced students' opportunities to extend or consolidate learning. More effective use could be made of classroom assistants in planning and teaching lessons.
- Departmental procedures for assessment are systematic and consistent. Formal assessments take place regularly and cover all aspects of English. The record of students' achievement is very helpful and includes self-assessment and targets for improvement. The day-to-day marking is more variable in quality and does not reinforce these targets closely enough.

### **Quality of the curriculum in English**

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- The curriculum successfully engages and motivates students. It is varied and interactive. Schemes of work provide clear guidance across all key stages and assessment is well integrated. Independent reading and links to the library are well promoted in Year 7.
- The Key Stage 3 curriculum has been directly designed to meet the needs of the students. It emphasises the study of literary texts and includes some new work such as a unit on the English language. Gaps include the use of information and communication technology (ICT), including media technology, and the systematic teaching of spelling. The programme includes an interesting range of units but more thought now needs to be given to issues such as progression across units and the pace of units. Extended learning tasks are enjoyed by students and provide good opportunities for developing study and research skills.
- The very thorough and systematic intervention programme provides extra help for a large number of students and includes Saturday sessions, a study day at Hull University, and other well-planned, additional lessons in English. The department also offers a number of enrichment activities such as an essay prize, public speaking, and visits to the theatre.

## **Effectiveness of leadership and management in English**

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is good.

- Very good leadership is provided by a dedicated and effective head of department. She is well supported by a hard-working and cohesive team. They have clear views about English and work well together.
- The department is well supported by the senior leadership team which has prioritised further improvements to English alongside developing literacy across the school. Senior leaders work closely with both students and teachers to raise standards in English.
- Students' progress is monitored very closely and action taken where underachievement has been noted. A good range of monitoring activities is used to develop a secure understanding of strengths and weaknesses. This leads to honest and accurate self-assessment. The subject action plan includes some well-chosen areas for development but does not identify how teaching and learning are to be improved.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- increasing the proportion of good and outstanding teaching by:
  - improving the clarity and impact of learning objectives in lessons, and providing sufficient time for students to extend and consolidate their learning
  - identifying in the subject action plan effective strategies to further enhance teaching and learning in English
- improving progress in the Key Stage 3 curriculum by:
  - reviewing the balance of literary and non-literary units, and making better use of ICT, including moving-image technology
  - identifying more clearly opportunities for progression in students' skills, knowledge and understanding across the different units.

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

**Philip Jarrett**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**