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Ms S Ramsay
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Ramsey

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 11 and 12 January 2012 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 eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is good.

- Attainment has historically been below average but improved in 2011 to broadly average. The proportion of A and A* grades remained below average. GCSE English Literature results also improved substantially. The school has been very successful in helping students whose circumstance make them potentially vulnerable, such as students eligible for free school meals, to achieve higher than average standards in relation to the groups nationally.
- Students' progress has been consistently at least good over recent years. The proportion of students making the expected progress has improved year-on-year and was above average last year. The progress of some groups of students, such as students with special educational needs

and/or disabilities and students for whom English is an additional language, has been outstanding.

- Learning and progress were good in lessons observed. Students were keen to do well. In the best lessons, they displayed high levels of seriousness about learning and there was some excellent collaborative group work.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- Students are very positive about English. They respect and like their teachers and enjoy the variety in lessons. Students work hard for their teachers and value the extra individual help available at all times.
- Very strong relationships are at the heart of the good teaching. The impact of some teaching over time has been outstanding. Lessons are lively and mostly engaging. Teachers make good use of a wide variety of interesting approaches and resources. They are enthusiastic and know the students very well, especially those with particular learning needs. They ensure that these students are fully involved in lessons.
- In lessons observed, learning objectives were sometimes too broad to enhance students' progress. The level of challenge was not always high enough for more able students especially where teachers spent too much time supporting other students. The best lessons included good opportunities to check the learning of all students through effective questioning but this was not consistent.
- The best marking provided detailed comments on students' work together with positive encouragement. In general, however, there was too little emphasis on identifying weaknesses and providing next steps for students, including for more able students. As a result, some students were uncertain about what they needed to do to improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced with a particular emphasis on literary study. It is well planned, especially at Key Stage 4. Innovative elements include the three-year programme for Key Stage 4 and enrichment units for younger students. The curriculum is reviewed and revised regularly.
- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is partly planned around the needs of GCSE. Controlled conditions assignments, unseen poetry, and GCSE-type texts feature prominently. Students enjoy the work but do not make as much progress as in GCSE. There is a need for more explicit teaching of speaking and listening and more opportunities for students to produce moving image texts. There is also scope for a more systematic approach to promoting independent reading, including giving students extended opportunities for the personal exploration of texts.

- The programme of enrichment activities is good. Intervention and support for students who need extra help are effective and well planned. The very strong literacy programme includes: extra lessons for younger students in Applied English; a project involving local primary schools; and the work of the coordinator on whole-school initiatives.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is good.

- Leaders and managers have contributed strongly to improved progress and attainment in English. In particular, there has been pronounced success in 'closing the gap' between different groups of students.
- The department is well supported by senior leaders who give high priority to English and the development of literacy across the school. English is well led. The subject leader is experienced and well respected. Teachers work well together and the positive ethos within the department is based on a strong commitment to meeting the needs of all students.
- A good range of monitoring strategies is employed including: a comprehensive annual subject audit; formal and informal lesson observations; feedback from students; and regular standardising meetings. This is enhanced by very effective analysis of performance data. As a result, self-evaluation in English is accurate and realistic.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising attainment at the end of Key Stage 4, including the proportion of students achieving the highest grades, by:
 - improving the clarity of learning objectives and their impact on students' progress in lessons
 - providing better guidance through marking to students, including more able students, on how to improve their work
 - reviewing approaches to promoting independent reading at Key Stage 3, including giving students more opportunities to develop their own personal responses to texts.

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

Philip Jarrett
Her Majesty's Inspector