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23 January 2012

Mrs T Thomas  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Thomas

### **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 17 and 18 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 nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is satisfactory.

### **Achievement in English**

Achievement in English is satisfactory.

- Attainment has risen substantially since 2008. The GCSE results for English were broadly in line with average in 2011. This reflected good progress by many students from below average starting points. Students eligible for free school meals performed well. English Literature GCSE results have also improved although they remain below average. Standards are currently higher at Key Stage 3 than Key Stage 4.
- Progress overall has been average over recent years. More able students make good progress while students with low prior attainment, including non-statemented students with learning needs, do less well. Achievement is uneven in the sixth form with higher attainment and better progress in the A level course than at AS level.

- Learning and progress varied in the lessons observed. In a minority of lessons, students were sometimes passive and not always well motivated. They frequently lacked confidence in expressing their ideas in discussion. In the most effective lessons, all students were keen to do well, worked hard, and showed interest.

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

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

- Teaching observed varied in quality. Strengths included: good relationships with students; the use of active strategies and interesting resources; a good emphasis on speaking, listening and language issues; and effective use of questioning.
- Where lessons were less effective, the objectives were too broad to provide direction to learning, there was a slow pace and over-domination of discussion by teachers. Lessons sometimes started too slowly.
- Discussions with groups of students confirmed that most were very positive about English. Younger students stressed enjoyment and variety while older students spoke of the support and guidance provided.
- Assessment is of mixed quality. Some teachers know students very well and provide good, individual support and challenge in lessons. In other lessons, teachers missed opportunities to monitor the learning of all students closely enough. The best marking provides a detailed personal response to students, with helpful suggestions for improvement. Some teachers' marking of day-to-day work was poor, with too little intervention and too few suggestions for improvement.

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

The quality of the curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- The curriculum places strong emphasis on the study of literature. However, there is good balance provided by work on media and non-fiction, with some interesting work at Key Stage 3 on speaking, listening and language study. Students' use of information and communication technology, including media technology, is variable although there is some good practice in the department. There is no clear policy at present on promoting independent reading.
- Assessment is clearly integrated into schemes of work. Guidance for staff on different units is helpful and includes lists of key words and the particular language skills to be taught. There is good emphasis on improving spelling across Key Stage 3.
- The school is beginning to develop a systematic approach to cross-curricular literacy. This includes an initiative involving feeder primary schools, some integrated programmes in Year 7, an emphasis on improving communication skills across the school, and extra literacy lessons for students with particular learning needs.

- There is a limited range of enrichment activities. Intervention initiatives include GCSE revision classes, and one-to-one tuition. Students stress that teachers always find time to help them outside lessons.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is satisfactory.

- The subject leader provides clear direction to work in English. She is a committed and effective classroom practitioner. Teachers work closely together. The senior leadership places high priority on English and literacy. The links between English and the special needs department are very good.
- Leaders and managers have helped bring about improved attainment in English since 2008. There is a clear commitment to further improvements. With a core of good teachers in the department and the whole-school emphasis on literacy, the capacity for further improvement is good.
- The subject improvement plan identifies some well-chosen topics for improvement. However, there is too little emphasis on teaching and how to evaluate the impact of actions on outcomes for students. This is at least partly because formal strategies for monitoring and evaluating teaching are limited at present. Students' progress is monitored closely and teachers have regular opportunities to discuss and moderate work. However, there is scope for a more systematic approach to observing lessons, sampling work and getting feedback from students.

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

- increasing the number of good and outstanding lessons by improving:
  - the clarity and impact of learning objectives
  - the effectiveness of starts to lessons
  - the quality of feedback given to students on how to improve their work
- providing more systematic opportunities to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning in English.

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**