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Mr D Bowes
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Bowes

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 31 January and 1 February 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 good.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is good.

- Attainment dipped in 2011 but has been consistently well above average at the end of Key Stage 4. Progress is good overall although more able students perform better than those students who enter the school at, or below, national average standards. Current attainment is high in all aspects of English. Students are articulate and thoughtful in discussion. Their response to reading is mature and perceptive. However, writing is often less effective, including its technical accuracy.
- Attainment has traditionally been above average across the different sixth form English courses. Results have slipped over the past two years, notably in English Literature. Progress is currently good across the full range of courses.

- Progress in lessons is good. Students' attitudes and motivation are very positive. When given opportunities, they can exercise initiative and leadership. In the best lessons, there is a real seriousness about learning and an impressive spirit of academic inquiry.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- Most students are very positive about English. They recognise that teachers are knowledgeable and passionate about the subject. They enjoy the variety in lessons and value the individual support available.
- Key strengths of lessons observed included: very good relationships; effective use of a range of good, lively activities; and good emphasis on extended time for students to discuss issues. In some lessons, including those in the sixth form, students were very clear about the assessment criteria and used them well to set their own targets.
- Occasional weaknesses in lessons included learning objectives that were not sufficiently clear and the use of a limited range of strategies for meeting the needs of the most and least able students. Questioning was often effective although teachers sometimes failed to monitor the progress of average and less able students sufficiently in lessons.
- The marking of formal assessments and extended pieces of work is mostly good, involving detailed feedback and setting specific targets for improvement. The marking of day-to-day work is generally less effective.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- The curriculum places a particular emphasis on the study of literature, including the literary heritage. This is balanced by a good focus on media units, including producing moving-image texts. Speaking and listening and language study also feature well, although students in some classes do too little extended writing.
- The curriculum is distinctive and includes interesting elements such as the media unit on theme parks. The department promotes a love of reading well through timetabled private reading time and class readers are sometimes well used to extend students' reading beyond school.
- Teachers are given some choice and flexibility over the curriculum at Key Stage 3. This encourages them to teach texts about which they are enthusiastic. The department recognises the need to monitor provision more carefully to ensure that students receive the same entitlement across the key stage and to improve guidance for teachers on the progression of skills, knowledge and understanding from year-to-year.
- A good range of enrichment activities enhances the curriculum. This includes: book clubs for students in each key stage; a film club; activities to support reading; a Writer of the Week plus theatre and cinema visits.

Additional support is provided for identified students through extra literacy classes at Key Stage 3 together with a good range of GCSE interventions.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is good.

- Self-evaluation in English is honest and accurate. Senior and subject leaders have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in English. The school has responded well to disappointing results in 2011. Appropriate action has been taken and current indications are that attainment is likely to rise again in 2012.
- Good self-evaluation has built on the results of a very systematic and thorough departmental review in 2010 together with rigorous analysis of performance at all levels and across all groups of students.
- The newly appointed subject leader has made a good start in focusing discussion on teaching and learning issues, and sharing good practice. She is well supported by three key stage post-holders who exercise effective leadership in their different areas. The department has a very clear sense of direction based around a number of key principles such as the importance of literary study, mixed-ability teaching and equity of provision.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- enhancing the consistency of teaching by:
 - improving the clarity and impact of learning objectives
 - strengthening practical classroom approaches to differentiation
 - monitoring the learning of all students more systematically
- raising standards of writing by:
 - providing more opportunities for extended writing
 - developing a consistent approach to teaching grammar and spelling
 - ensuring that students respond to teachers' marking and corrections.

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