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Mr J Osborn
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Dear Mr Osborn

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 25 and 26 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 parts of eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is satisfactory.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is satisfactory.

- Students enter the school with attainment which is below average. In 2011, the attainment of Year 11 students was just below average and above that in 2010. The school's assessment information indicates that students broadly met the challenging targets set for them. Current Year 11 students are on track to improve on the 2011 results.
- Year 11 students made satisfactory progress from their starting points. Girls made markedly better progress than boys. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities made similar progress to their peers.
- Sixth form students achieve standards which are broadly average and make at least satisfactory progress.

- In lessons, students make mostly satisfactory and, sometimes, good progress. They settle to work promptly and most work hard. They enjoy working in pairs and small groups, discussing their ideas. In most lessons, although they are encouraged to answer teachers' questions, they are not challenged sufficiently to make extended contributions.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory.

- Teachers develop good relationships with students and manage behaviour well. They use their good subject knowledge to plan lessons with clear objectives. Some teachers specify different expectations for students of differing abilities, but this is not routinely the case so that students are not always challenged at an appropriate level.
- In the better lessons, teachers use questions well to check students' understanding and develop their ideas. However, too often teachers do not ask supplementary questions to extend discussion or refine ideas.
- Teachers mark students' work regularly and usually set targets for them to improve their work. In the best examples, teachers link these targets clearly to specific parts of the work so that students can see exactly how they need to adapt their writing. This is not the case for all teachers.
- Teaching in sixth form lessons is effective. Teachers probe students' understanding, develop their subject knowledge and ensure that they are familiar with the criteria by which they will be assessed.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced with adequate coverage of different genres and types of text. Teachers have begun to review Key Stage 3 schemes of work, especially those for Year 9, but some units do not engage students or clearly develop the skills which may be required at GCSE level.
- The Key Stage 4 curriculum is increasingly flexible with students taking some aspects of GCSE qualifications early. Teachers target students carefully and provide a broad range of additional support which is beginning to raise achievement.
- The school gives reading a high profile, especially in Key Stage 3, through a regular library-based lesson which broadens students' awareness of different authors. Teachers set high expectations for regular reading out of school and progress is checked through online quizzes. However, in other work, some students complete less extended writing than might be expected and more short-answer exercises.
- The school provides a wide range of enrichment activities including regular theatre trips, competitions, visits by authors and after-school or Saturday revision sessions.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is satisfactory.

- The newly appointed subject leader analyses performance thoroughly and has an accurate understanding of the department's strengths and areas for development. He sets a clear direction for English, strongly focused on raising achievement, and has accelerated change in the subject area.
- The subject leader uses his careful analysis to set relevant priorities for improvement and the resulting plan is well focused. Already, the English team has improved the consistency of lesson planning and some aspects of assessment. Sixth form provision has grown and achievement is improving.
- The subject leader monitors provision in English regularly and provides helpful feedback to teachers on what needs to improve. For example, scrutiny of marking led to clear recommendations on better practice.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising students' attainment and increasing their progress by:
 - accelerating boys' achievement throughout the school
 - providing a consistently high level of challenge in lessons
 - ensuring that students regularly complete extended writing tasks
- improving teaching so that most is good by ensuring that all teachers:
 - use a full range of questions to check students' understanding and develop their thinking
 - link their comments to specific examples in students' work so that they understand exactly what to do to improve.
- ensuring that the curriculum, especially at Key Stage 3, engages students' interest and provides progression in key skills.

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

Martin Cragg
Her Majesty's Inspector