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Mr D Howell
Principal
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Dear Mr Howell

Ofsted 2012–13 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 24 and 25 April 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 documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of eight lessons, two of which were observed jointly with school colleagues.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is good.

- Students make good progress from their starting points, meaning that they leave school with attainment that is above the national average. Some students make outstanding progress. The most able students are doing so with increasing consistency, shown in the higher proportion achieving the top grades at GCSE. Students with statements of special educational needs make notably strong progress in the subject. The first cohort of students studying English at A Level are currently making good progress.
- All groups of students achieve equally well in reading, writing, speaking and listening and the majority display positive attitudes to the subject. They have a particularly good grasp of how writers and others use language to engage, influence or inform an audience. Students have an

awareness of how and when to use their English skills in other subjects across the curriculum.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- The consistently good day-to-day teaching makes a significant contribution to students' achievement. Teachers have high expectations and most students respond positively to these by contributing well to lessons and taking pride in their written work. Lessons are planned well and resources used stimulate thinking as well as often showing students what 'good' looks like. Students appreciate the quality and regularity of the feedback they receive and are able to explain how this helps them to improve. A particularly strong feature of teaching is the consistent and effective way in which the processes of reading and writing are modelled to students. This is one way in which teachers' good subject knowledge is evident.
- Some opportunities are missed, even when teaching is strong, to ensure that all groups of students are supported in developing as independent learners, for example by being actively engaged throughout the lesson. This is already a focus of the team's work. This inspection endorses the department's priority to enhance the existing level of challenge that the most able students experience in lessons to ensure that this group consistently makes rapid and sustained progress.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- The well-planned curriculum ensures the progression of skills and that students experience a balance of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Reading has a particularly high profile in Key Stage 3, with every student studying at least two full novels each year. Students enjoy this and the benefit is seen, for example, in their ability to understand the writer's craft. Curriculum plans are helpful in encouraging consistency across teaching groups without limiting individual teachers' creativity.
- Planned opportunities exist for students to read, write and communicate with a range of real purposes and audiences, for example during the Year 8 alternative curriculum day. However, these opportunities are not fully embedded across the curriculum. Similarly, the good existing examples of specific enrichment activities are not extensive.
- The establishment of the curriculum at Key Stage 5 involved students in the text choices. Adaptations, such as an increased focus on aspects of historical context, are as the result of good assessment.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is outstanding.

- High-quality leadership by the well-respected subject leader has resulted in sustained improvements in achievement. A strong and shared purpose is embedded across the team, evident in the consistently good day-to-day teaching. Responsibilities are delegated well and individual teachers show leadership in the sharing of resources and development of good practice.
- Regular, thorough and developmental monitoring and evaluation of provision in the subject leads to effective improvement planning. Actions taken as a result are reviewed and lead to strong impact. Self-evaluation is accurate and based on a robust set of evidence. Students are set challenging targets and similar ambition is reflected in the department's planned next steps which match the inspection findings.
- Following assessments, students have been moved effectively to teaching groups that are more precisely suited to their particular target grade or ability. The leadership shown here, ably supported by senior leaders, is a hugely significant factor in student's successful achievement.
- English is a high-profile department in the school and teachers contribute to aspects of whole-school professional development. The positive, encouraging and successful ethos created is evident in the fact that almost all students in the first cohort of the school's Key Stage 5 have chosen to study A-level English.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- enhancing the rate of progress for the most able students so that it is consistently outstanding by ensuring that consistently good day-to-day teaching extends the current level of challenge for these students
- improving the English curriculum by:
 - embedding a greater range of opportunities for students to read, write and communicate with real and relevant audiences and purposes
 - offering more opportunities to enhance students' learning through enrichment activities.

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

James McNeillie
Her Majesty's Inspector