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Mr J Didymus
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Dear Mr Didymus

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 14 and 15 May 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 11 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is satisfactory.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is satisfactory.

- Over the past three years, students have made inadequate progress in English and attainment at GCSE has been well below average.
- Current students are making satisfactory progress in lessons due to improvements in the use of assessment and more challenging targets. The school's data indicate a projected rise in English GCSE results in 2012, which are likely to exceed the government's floor standard, the minimum expectation for attainment.
- The school has begun to address the significant variations in achievement between different groups of students, and their weak language and literacy skills. For example, the school's data indicate that disabled students and those with special educational needs, and those with low prior attainment, achieve in line with similar groups nationally.

- Students demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and at least satisfactory behaviour in their English lessons. In the most engaging lessons, behaviour is good and students work well together in groups. When given the opportunity, students apply their skills independently in learning as seen in a Year 10 lesson where students worked to identify what makes a good teacher.
- Attainment in A-level English courses is broadly average and students make satisfactory progress. Students enjoy interactive approaches to evaluating texts and exploring different interpretations. They value the additional support provided by teachers.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory.

- While teaching is satisfactory overall, there are many examples of good teaching. The characteristic strengths of teaching include: positive relationships; lesson planning that focuses on suitable learning objectives and effective modelling of skills; and use of teaching assistants to support low attaining students. In the most effective lessons, teachers constantly assess students' progress and ask challenging questions to extend their understanding. In these lessons, time is used effectively to move the learning forward at a good pace.
- Across the key stages, students enjoy activities such as role play and discussion, but younger students and boys in particular say they would like more active approaches to learning and, in some lessons, less 'listening to the teacher'.
- Students' progress has been inhibited in the past by weaknesses in matching lessons to the range of abilities within the sets. While this is improving, some teachers are still not adapting lessons sufficiently to meet individual needs. In particular, there is insufficient challenge to enable students with high prior attainment to reach the top levels and grades.
- The recently introduced whole-school progress monitoring system, together with the Assessing Pupils' Progress guidelines, is enabling the English department to monitor and evaluate the progress of individuals and groups of students towards more challenging targets. Any underachievement is identified and appropriate intervention provided.
- All students know their targets and feedback in marking helps them to know how to improve their work. Due to regular moderation, teachers' assessments are becoming increasingly accurate.
- The quality of teaching on A-level courses is satisfactory overall with examples of good teaching.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is balanced in its coverage of speaking and listening, reading and writing. It includes drama but limited use of media and

information and communication technology. Students read a range of books in lessons, but few students engage in wider independent reading.

- Collaboration of the whole department in reviewing the curriculum, and preparing schemes of work and resources online, is raising morale.
- Enrichment activities enhance students' learning and include a visit to the Globe Theatre, a book week and visiting authors.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is satisfactory.

- The Head of English, supported by recently appointed key stage leaders, has nurtured a cohesive team that is focused on raising attainment in the subject.
- Staff say that department meetings are more focused on teaching and learning than previously. The impact is clear in the improvements in these areas. Given the evident impact of systems that are now in place, the capacity for further improvement in English is satisfactory.
- Feedback from lesson observations does not always focus sufficiently on the impact of teaching on the achievement of all students. However, self-evaluation identifies the most important priorities for improvement. The raising achievement plan provides clear direction and is leading to effective action.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- the consistent use of targets and assessment to adapt lessons to meet the needs of all students, particularly those with high prior attainment
- students' independence in learning, and the engagement of boys, through more interactive approaches including media technology
- the development of students' language and literacy skills, including through promoting their wider reading.

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

Sue Frater
Her Majesty's Inspector