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11 July 2012

Mrs J Tiller
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Dear Mrs Tiller

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 12 and 13 June 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 eight lessons and one reading session for Year 7 students.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is satisfactory and improving.

- Attainment has risen over recent years at the end of Key Stage 4 and was close to the national average in 2011. Girls attain more highly than boys although the progress of both groups is broadly similar. The performance of students known to be eligible for free school meals has improved and is in line with the national picture. Entry data show that many students struggle with writing.
- Progress has also improved in recent years and is now at least satisfactory for all groups of students. The school's assessments, based on detailed analysis, suggest that achievement is likely to continue to improve. Attainment in the sixth form is broadly in line with average. This reflects good progress for students.

- Learning in lessons observed was good overall. Students are mostly keen to learn and behaviour is good. They work well in small groups and listen carefully. More able students are often both confident and articulate.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- Teaching is good overall. This partly reflects successful recruitment of specialist teachers and greater stability of staffing. Strengths observed in lessons include: good relationships; the use of a wide range of lively and interactive tasks; good modelling by teachers of writing; and, in the best lessons, thoughtful approaches to differentiation and classroom discussion.
- At times, lessons tend to be rushed and teachers move on too quickly before students' learning has been fully consolidated. This reflects a tendency to plan for activities rather than outcomes in learning. Learning objectives are not always specific enough in lessons.
- Students are very positive about English and speak warmly of their teachers. They enjoy lessons and appreciate the support provided. They especially welcome the emphasis on creative responses and the encouragement to think for themselves: 'You are never scared to express your ideas...and teachers push you to have original thoughts'.
- All students understand their target level for English. The best marking provides detailed feedback and occasional short-term targets for improvement. However, this is not consistent and too much marking in books provides merely ticks or short comments. Teachers' comments are not always followed up by students.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- The curriculum is well planned at both Key Stages 3 and 4. Helpful examples of schemes of work ensure consistency while giving teachers the freedom to develop their own ideas. The curriculum emphasises creative responses and originality.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. There are some interesting units of work such as one in Year 8 on language change. Work within units is frequently imaginative. For example, a unit on Shakespeare involves *Dr Who*, the film *Shakespeare in Love*, the animated tales, some practical drama, extracts from a number of plays and research into The Globe Theatre. Teachers make English relevant through their choice of texts, including media texts. At present, too little emphasis is placed on encouraging wider, independent reading in English lessons. Spelling is not taught explicitly in all classes and students have too few opportunities to write at length and to revise or redraft work.
- The school meets the needs of disengaged pupils, or those whose circumstances may make them vulnerable, through providing additional literacy qualifications and through a nurture class for younger students.

More able students have been entered in Year 9 for GCSE Media Studies and they found this highly motivating. The English department is involved in supporting and training other departments in literacy. Extra-curricular opportunities include a creative writing club for younger students and a newspaper project.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is good.

- The head of department is enthusiastic and committed. There is a good sense of direction and effective collaboration. The department is ambitious about raising standards further and expectations are high. Consistency in teaching across the department reflects good teamwork.
- Monitoring and evaluation are highly systematic and very thorough. All teachers are involved in observing lessons and providing feedback and monitoring of plans and students' work is regular, alongside moderation meetings and feedback from students. There is effective analysis of performance data and action to support students, where necessary. This leads to accurate self-evaluation.
- The subject action plan rightly focuses on further improvements in achievement and identifies some appropriate areas for development although there is a lack of specificity about how to improve teaching and learning further. Standards have risen in English and the capacity for further improvement is good.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving teaching by:
 - providing time for students to complete activities and consolidate their learning
 - making better use of clear learning objectives and giving more helpful feedback to students on their written work
- raising attainment in writing by:
 - providing more opportunities for extended writing and redrafting
 - developing a more systematic approach to the teaching of spelling.

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