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Mr S Box
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Box

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 3 and 4 July 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 outstanding.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is outstanding.

- Students enter with above average attainment and make excellent progress to achieve significantly better than average results at GCSE. In 2011, over half achieved grades A* or A in English Language and in Literature.
- All groups achieve very highly, including students known to be eligible for free school meals, those for whom English is an additional language, disabled students and those with special educational needs. There is no significant difference between the attainment and progress of boys and girls by the end of Key Stage 4.
- English Literature is a popular sixth form choice. Results at AS and A level are impressive. In 2011, nearly half of all students gained A* or A at A level, demonstrating outstanding progress and attainment. At AS level,

over two thirds gained A or B, twice the national average for selective schools.

- Students are articulate, reflective and ambitious. They share an exuberantly communicated pleasure in all aspects of English. Year 12 students speak of 'being really stretched' and agree that 'everyone talks about reading all the time'. Year 10 students value being able to 'dive deeper and see more of a text' and enjoy 'looking at specifics of language'.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is outstanding.

- Students regard their teachers with respect and affection. They identify as particular strengths teachers' ability to 'push everyone to think'. Key Stage 3 students appreciate how teachers 'speak to *us* as people'. Sixth form students value the way 'almost every lesson is structured like a debate'. Teachers have extensive and enthusiastically shared subject knowledge and model good practice in their own speaking and writing. Through well-directed, open questions they challenge students to reflect and to develop their initial responses.
- Almost all marking combines encouragement with specific guidance on how to improve. Teachers use a range of resources confidently and create opportunities for students to contribute actively to their learning – through role play, for example, and debate.
- The needs of those for whom English is an additional language, disabled students and those with special educational needs are successfully met, partly through one-to-one support in lessons and partly through teachers' careful implementation of guidance from the special educational needs team.
- Very occasionally, overlong explanations by a teacher or domination of group work by one or two particularly assertive students limits the effectiveness of a lesson.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is outstanding.

- The curriculum is broad, balanced, lively and inclusive. Recent revision of Key Stage 3 has been especially imaginative and ambitious. National Curriculum requirements are embedded within a stepped sequence of challenging activities, drawing on drama, films, journalism, television, poetry and prose. Expectations are high. In Year 7, for example, students monitor the evolution of English through the changing forms of the Lord's Prayer from medieval English, through the King James's Bible and Book of Common Prayer to modern, colloquial interpretations.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strongly promoted through themes explored, topics debated and skills developed collaboratively. Occasionally, a focus on examination techniques inhibits other learning.

- Many sixth form students opt for AS and A Level English Literature. They find their course 'above and beyond expectations'. Those choosing the International Baccalaureate Diploma enjoy its breadth and variety and feel that they are 'culturally aware and connected to the world'.
- The mainstream curriculum is extensively complemented by events such as creative writing competitions, weekly reading and writing clubs and debating, and by theatre trips, visiting writers and collaboration with the local library. English Ambassadors in the sixth form organise subject-linked activities for younger students and mentor those needing extra help.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is outstanding.

- You present justifiably high expectations for this strong department. With two senior leadership members working within the department and a thoughtful, persuasive and proactive subject leader, English is a pace-setter for the school in terms of achievement and student engagement.
- Systematic monitoring of teaching and learning sets challenging targets and underpins performance management. There is a strongly collegiate ethos; teachers share resources and learn from each other. The department is enterprising in its response to national and international trends – introduction of the International Baccalaureate, for example – and to priorities identified through its careful and accurate self-evaluation.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that:
 - all students make a positive contribution to pair and group work
 - a balance is maintained between developing effective examination skills and promoting thoughtful enjoyment of language and literature.

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

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector