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4 February 2013

Mr Nigel Barrow
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Barrow

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 28 and 29 January, 2013, 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: discussion with you and the member of your leadership team line-managing English, and with the head of department, teachers, and groups of students from each key stage; review of relevant documents; scrutiny of students' work; and observation of eleven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is good.

- Attainment by all groups in English Language GCSE has been significantly above average for two years. In 2012, the average points score gained by students known to be eligible for additional funding - the Pupil Premium - was higher than the average for all students nationally. This reflected well-targeted interventions to support those whose learning needs were identified through careful analysis of regularly updated information about students' knowledge, skills and progress. Entering students for GCSE early in Year 11 has worked well.
- When, in 2012, all students were entered for GCSE English Literature, the proportion of A* to C grades gained was well below average, although

able students did well. This year, three teaching sets in Key Stage 4 are concentrating on entry to English as a single GCSE. Those who find aspects of the course especially challenging benefit from working in small groups, with careful support from a higher level teaching assistant or from individual support in larger groups.

- Students are keen to do well and are very responsive to guidance. They value being taught in ability-based sets, feeling justifiably confident that the balance between challenge and support meets their needs well.
- The academy is in the early stages of establishing a sixth form. Numbers taking English Literature at AS and A level are still very small and performance at AS level in 2012 was below average. Inspection evidence indicates stronger performance in the current AS group.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is good with outstanding elements.

- Students have justifiable confidence in their teachers' subject knowledge, commitment and skills. In almost all the lessons observed, teachers' planning, enthusiasm, secure grasp of the material being explored, questioning skills and readiness to use a range of methods and resources ensured that students made good or better progress. Able GCSE students, for example, were challenged to think about what constitutes 'art' and then to consider the part played by their preconceptions in the critical analysis of any art form, including poetry. This led to detailed and productive exploration of a poem implying a set of relationships through use of language with social and political overtones.
- Most students are making good or better progress. Very occasionally a few lose focus or struggle with the writing task set and their difficulties are not identified quickly enough to ensure that they benefit from the lesson as a whole.
- Students' work is marked regularly and, on most occasions, combines encouragement with clear and specific guidance on how to improve.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- At all stages, care is taken to prepare students thoroughly for formal assessments and examinations. Choice of texts and topics engages boys and girls. Year 9 students spoke enthusiastically of the World War I unit in Key Stage 3, for example, discussing the contribution made by film clips, contemporary news reports, photographs and letters to their appreciation of the poetry. Most enjoy creative writing, and would like to do more. Year 8 students particularly value the fortnightly lessons in which they debate the use of key words and images to imply meanings in writing they have not seen before. The positive impact of this approach can be tracked

through students' subsequent work. It is also enhancing teaching methods across all years.

- The importance of reading is well understood, and all teachers encourage students to bring books into school to supplement the selections provided for each class. Lack of a well-stocked central resource does, however, limit students' scope for independent reading and the development of important library skills.
- While the mainstream curriculum is good, its extension through English-related activities and through work with practising writers and performers is limited. Opportunities for this kind of enrichment through collaboration with the academy's performing arts specialism are not exploited.

Effectiveness of leadership in and management of English

The effectiveness of leadership in and management of English is good.

- You and your senior team set high expectations, and line-management of the department is lively and rigorous. Subject leadership is strong, with the Head of English modelling outstanding practice and using regularly updated information about students' progress to set appropriate targets for students and for teachers. Priorities for teachers' professional development are informed by perceptive monitoring of teaching and learning. All members of the department feel supported and are happy to learn from each other's successes. They respond well to opportunities to develop their leadership skills. Capacity for further improvement is strong.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing opportunities for the English department to collaborate with and share resources with the academy's performing arts specialism
- ensuring that students read widely and purposefully, across a broad range of fiction and non-fiction, by
 - embedding the development of library skills within the English curriculum
 - establishing on-site resources to support an ambitious reading programme for all students.

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