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Mrs J Yarwood
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Yarwood

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 30 and 31 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: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is outstanding.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is outstanding.

- In both GCSE English Language and English Literature attainment is consistently well above average. The proportions that gain the higher grades of A* and A are also significantly above average. School assessments show that the school is on track for another strong performance in 2013.
- Students consistently make outstanding progress in English. Both boys and girls make excellent progress from their starting points at Key Stage 2. Those eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding) and lower ability students also make better progress than average but it is not as strong as other groups. As a result of targeted support this year, some of these students are improving their skills and confidence in reading through a well-managed, graded programme.

- Students of all abilities really enjoy English lessons. Many are enthusiastic about English and keen to improve. The more able are challenged well to develop higher order thinking and more creative writing.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is outstanding.

- All observed teaching was at least good and the majority was outstanding. Lessons are led with great enthusiasm and relationships are excellent. The presentation of information and explanation of tasks are consistently of a high standard. High quality planning focuses precisely on the skills to be learnt and specifies what students should achieve. Lessons are accurately pitched to meet students' needs, including the less able. Expert commentary and questioning stimulates thinking and moves students forward, including the more able. Skilfully-sequenced tasks incrementally extend understanding and methodically develop a particular skill. Creative and varied activities extend students' use of language and develop their personal response. Well-organised learning resources are used exceptionally well to stimulate students' imagination and to engage them in practical activity. On occasion, not all tasks in a sequence are sharply relevant to the key purpose of the lesson.
- Assessment at the end of each topic has a well-defined focus. This gives students accurate information about what they have achieved and specific guidance on how to improve. The quality of marking is high in all year groups. Feedback is detailed and constructive. Teachers often give their personal response to students' writing. Teachers respond directly to ideas or concerns expressed in students' self-assessments. Peer assessment is well-structured and gives students a secure understanding of assessment criteria.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is outstanding.

- The two-year Key Stage 3 curriculum is very well organised, with a rigorous focus on the development and assessment of specific skills in English. The curriculum is highly effective because each unit of work methodically reinforces recent learning and explicitly introduces new learning. Assessment is accurately tailored to measure the progress of students in acquiring the skills in each unit. A broad and balanced range of topics and texts is covered, including poetry, drama and the media. Particular attention has been paid to ensuring that texts interest both boys and girls.
- At Key Stage 4, the introduction of GCSE work provides a valuable focus for learning in Year 9. Students experience a good variety of texts in Year 9 while developing the skills for GCSE. The Key Stage 4 curriculum focuses accurately on the key requirements at GCSE. A literacy option has been introduced for a small number of Year 10 and 11 students. This has

improved students' skills and enjoyment in reading but it is too early to judge its impact on GCSE outcomes.

- In liaison with special educational needs and library staff, the curriculum has been extended to better meet the range of literacy and learning needs. Innovative work includes training for parents in using games with their children to improve their knowledge of letters and sounds in spelling. Developing links with primary schools have involved joint assessment of English work and discussion of approaches to teaching.
- Students go to the theatre, work with authors and join a book club. The English department and the library promote reading for pleasure and research very effectively. Key Stage 4 students have good opportunities for extra revision and examination preparation. Students' roles as ambassadors for English are at an early stage of development.

Effectiveness of leadership in and management of English

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

- The subject leader, her assistant and her team are passionate about English, have high expectations, and inspire students. The subject leader is a senior GCSE examiner and her expertise accurately guides the planning of teaching, learning and assessment. Frequent professional dialogue within the team contributes to high quality teaching. Leadership responsibilities are delegated effectively and staff have good opportunities to take on new roles. Newly qualified teachers have thrived in the department. The evaluation of student performance is rigorous and leads to action to adjust teaching or make additional provision. Strengths and weaknesses are identified clearly and robust action is taken to tackle weaker performance in certain examination questions or by particular groups of students. Senior and subject leaders carry out regular and robust reviews of the department's planning, the students' work and the quality of teaching. Their questioning of evidence is probing and the outcomes of evaluation accurately inform priorities for action in the development plan for English.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- continuing to develop the provision for lower attaining pupils and those eligible for the pupil premium.

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

Bernard Campbell
Her Majesty's Inspector