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Mr D Williams
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Dear Mr Williams

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 26 and 27 February 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 good.

Achievement in English is good.

- Attainment in English by the end of Key Stage 4 has been broadly average for the past three years and students make good progress from their starting points, which are below average. Due to an exceptionally well planned curriculum in Key Stage 3, progress for students in Years 7 to 9 is often outstanding. There are no significant variations in achievement between different groups, including children from service and traveller families, those known to be eligible for free school meals, disabled students and those with special educational needs.
- Students demonstrate exceptionally positive attitudes to learning and engage confidently in a range of activities in English lessons, particularly in

discussion and creative writing. They are able to show independence and initiative, for instance in raising thoughtful questions.

Teaching in English is good.

- Key features of teaching include positive working relationships, a range of engaging tasks, giving students a structured approach to their work, and the use of assessment. Effective use is made of drama and a range of media such as newspapers and films. Low-achieving students are supported well by teaching assistants who are linked to the subject, and by revision and intervention programmes.
- Teachers regularly question students to check their understanding, but do not always follow this through by adapting the tasks and their questioning to enable all to make as much progress as possible. Written comments in marking help students to know how to improve their work and students engage in assessing their own work, and that of others, to good effect.

The curriculum in English is good.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced, covering reading, writing, speaking and listening, including media technology, poetry and drama. Schemes of work, lesson plans and resources for Key Stage 3 are exemplary and reviewed regularly. The focus on developing language skills in Year 7 is particularly good, given the weak literacy skills of some students. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is not planned as systematically, and progress in this key stage is not as rapid as in Key Stage 3.
- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is creative and engages students in actively investigating texts. Students enjoy discussions, debates, presentations, role play and using media, including making films, although they do not use information and communication technology frequently in English. The department has provided a good range of resources for each subject across the curriculum to develop students' literacy skills.
- Students' learning is very well enhanced by enrichment activities such as creative writing trips, theatre visits, reading groups, visiting authors and speakers, debating, the Speak Out Challenge, and The Times Spelling Bee. Such activities help students to make direct connections between lessons and the world beyond school.

Leadership and management of English are outstanding.

- Subject leadership inspires students and colleagues through a passionate commitment to the subject, a vision of engaging and enjoyable lessons, and very good subject knowledge. Its impact is seen in the improving trends in all aspects of the department's work.
- The subject leader is currently on maternity leave and another teacher is acting head of department during this time. The subject leader, and acting subject leader, are very well informed about developments in the subject

nationally and use this to improve the curriculum and teaching. Innovation and creativity are evident, especially in Key Stage 3.

- Staff work very well together and good practice is routinely shared. Subject responsibilities are beginning to be shared within the small department, which includes two specialist drama teachers. All staff are encouraged to contribute to developments.
- Excellent policies and procedures are followed consistently by all staff. In view of this, there is strong capacity to improve further. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation of lessons, students' work, and information about standards and progress, together with feedback from a group of students who help to lead improvements in learning, are used to identify key strengths and areas for development.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and identifies the most important priorities for improvement such as developing teachers' questioning skills to deepen students' thinking and improve their progress. It informs effective department development planning. The outstanding quality of leadership means that the English department has a very high profile in the life of the school and in supporting other schools locally.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing teachers' skills in adapting activities and their questioning to enable all students to make as much progress as possible.
- planning the curriculum for Key Stage 4.

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

Sue Frater
Her Majesty's Inspector