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Ms S Marooney
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Marooney

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 21 and 22 May 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: discussions with you and the head of department, interviews with other staff and students from each key stage; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of 12 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

Achievement in English is good.

- Students achieve well in English. They are enthusiastic and purposeful in their approach to learning. Over time, GCSE results in English Language have been above average. Current achievement continues to improve because the head of English carefully analyses results and routinely checks how well students are achieving. English teachers provide highly effective support for students at risk of underachieving. The gap in achievement between those eligible for free school meals and non-eligible students is rapidly narrowing.
- Results in English Literature have improved over time and are significantly above average, with just over half of the year group entered for the examination. However, the head of department is steadily increasing the numbers of students entered, with a long-term goal of entering all students for this examination.

Teaching in English is good with outstanding elements.

- Teachers are able draw on a range of high-quality, thought-provoking resources when planning their lessons. Their teaching is characterised by strong subject knowledge informing high quality questioning and probing and routine checking and re-shaping of tasks. Skills and understanding are effectively built with sufficient time for discussion, independent reflection and writing.
- Marking of work is helpful and developmental. Targets for improvement are well-known to students and understood. Students like the fact that teachers have high expectations of them and believe in their potential to achieve well. Students attribute their interest in the subject and their love of reading directly to the quality of the teaching they receive.
- Most students are making good or better progress. Very occasionally some of the less-able students struggle with the writing task set, particularly remembering to write consistently in standard English. In the best lessons, teachers reference the need for standard English and students are provided with a list of 'banned' words, to remind them. However, this approach is not consistent across the department.

The curriculum in English is outstanding.

- At each stage the quality of the curriculum is excellent. Great care is taken to prepare students thoroughly for formal assessments and examinations. Much thought has been put into planning topics that meet the specific needs of Durrington students while equally fostering their curiosity, creativity and enjoyment. Students join the school in Year 8. The two remaining years of Key Stage 3 focus on developing a love of creative writing and reading. Choice of topics and texts engages boys and girls alike. The head of English keeps the curriculum under constant review in order to adapt and adjust appropriately to the differing needs or aptitudes of each new intake.
- Effective arrangements ensure that students at risk of lagging behind catch up. This includes small group work, extra GCSE support lessons to help students reach target grades and one-to-one support for students who need extra help to become good readers.
- Students' learning is very effectively enhanced by regular theatre and cinema visits, contributions from visiting authors and participation in age-related reading groups. They are keen contributors to competitions such as the Amazing Book Awards, in which they review books, nominate a winner and have an opportunity to join a panel of judges to determine a winner.

Leadership and management of English are outstanding.

- The Head of the English department is passionate about the subject and sets exceptionally high standards. She is a nationally accredited SLE

(Specialist Leader of Education). Team members and other departments in local schools benefit enormously from her subject knowledge and expertise. She has steered a very large team skilfully, building on their particular strengths, developing a very cohesive approach to the teaching of English. Under her leadership achievement in English has been consistently good or better. Current achievement is better than in the past.

- Team members contribute very effectively to the development of literacy across all subject areas, providing training and guidance on the development of extended writing and reading for teachers of all subjects. The department is held in high esteem throughout the school and all team members play an active role in leading aspects of the school's training programme.
- The school employs a full-time, qualified librarian. Since her appointment the average number of loans per day has substantially increased. All students value her work and Year 8 students in particular feel that they benefit greatly from the fortnightly library lesson. All students commented favourably on the competitions and the regular opportunities to speak to visiting authors that are organised. The impact of the librarian's work is regularly evaluated with annual targets set to ensure that the resource continually provides value for money.
- You and members of your senior team set high expectations and the performance management of the department is rigorous. The department's self-evaluation is perceptive and accurate. Capacity for further improvement is strong.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing teachers' capacity to target, support and stretch students of differing abilities, so that all students, particularly the less-able meet their full potential
- sharing the best practice observed in teacher questioning and the use of standard English across the department and other subjects areas within the school.

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

Lesley Farmer
Her Majesty's Inspector