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Mrs K Sparling
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Sparling

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 24 and 25 June 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: meetings with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observations of 11 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is outstanding.

Achievement in English is outstanding.

- GCSE results in English and English Literature have consistently been considerably above the national average. Given that students, until recently, have entered the school with broadly average attainment, this represents excellent progress over time. This high attainment is consistent for different groups of students, such as those eligible for free school meals or from different ethnic backgrounds.
- The proportion of students making the expected progress exceeds the national average for girls. A high proportion - almost double the national average - makes exceptional progress. Good or outstanding progress continues into AS and A level courses. Current assessment information shows high achievement in all years and for all groups. In Year 7, the first school year to be mixed, both boys and girls are making good progress, but a higher proportion of girls than boys is making outstanding progress.
- In lessons, learning is consistently good or better. Students' books are extremely well presented and demonstrate a range of very well developed

skills. They show that students read widely and confidently, encountering challenging texts from Year 7 onwards and writing creatively and critically in response to them. Teachers mark work regularly and constructively. Some, but not all, take time to ensure that students respond to and act on their advice.

Teaching in English is outstanding.

- English lessons are characterised by high expectations, a brisk pace of learning, and enjoyment. Activities and materials are varied. They include technology and moving images to enhance the learning experience, such as filming students making speeches which they later evaluate. Students have a good understanding of media texts and their influence in the wider world. In Year 10, students expertly manipulated computer software to produce professional-standard DVD cover designs.
- In outstanding lessons, teachers develop students' writing skills at the same time as widening their understanding of social and cultural issues through literature. Year 9 students quickly picked up the key points about how to structure a short story, at the same time thinking deeply about the human rights issues central to an Alice Walker story.
- Occasionally, and particularly in Year 7, the impact of otherwise good teaching is diminished because a class is shared across two or more teachers. Some students' books reflect this lack of continuity in work that is unfinished or below the standards expected by the school.

The curriculum in English is outstanding.

- English teachers choose texts and approaches that will inspire and challenge students. Year 7 students take studying Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in their stride, uninhibited by the play's reputation as complex and difficult. Their books show high quality, imaginative responses to its core themes. Innovative approaches yield excellent results: Year 9 students write thought-provoking poetry inspired by great art and create art inspired by famous texts.
- School leaders review course choices constantly to ensure that they remain demanding but enjoyable. Students are consulted and their opinions inform changes. Students are helped to choose GCSE courses well matched to their abilities so that they are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Sixth form students read widely and beyond their course, both for pleasure and to extend their appreciation of literary criticism. This prepares them well for higher education and they rightly have the confidence to apply to prestigious universities.
- There are innumerable opportunities to write, speak and read outside the classroom. Many students are prize-winners in regional writing competitions; some have taken their debating skills into battle with other schools; Year 11 girls have written to an internationally renowned human rights lawyer, arguing their views about capital punishment, and had their letters published on the 'Reprieve' website. Year 9 girls have visited a

university media department and put their learning to good use by designing, editing and publishing the school magazine – 'Ink'.

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

- The head of English is passionate about the subject and about teaching. Her vision for the department is to encourage creativity alongside strong literacy skills and to nurture confidence in young people to tackle difficult texts with relish. The English team works together to achieve this. Teachers are prepared to take risks by planning lessons that make learning more exciting and challenging. They aim to teach students to think for themselves, to read widely and with curiosity, to draw their own conclusions and develop their own ideas.
- Students rate English highly and feel confident that they will achieve outstanding results in their examinations. They talk with enthusiasm about the books they are reading and about how the library is well-managed and responsive to their tastes and to reading trends. They make effective use of 'contact books' to track and review their success against targets. They know that they are expected to make rapid, measureable progress, from year to year, and do.
- School leaders review and evaluate the quality of provision in English rigorously. Targets set for the department are aspirational; any slippage is questioned and challenged through strong whole-school systems of accountability.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- closely monitoring the impact of shared classes, particularly in Year 7 to make sure that students in these lessons make progress at the same rapid pace as others and that their books show continuity of learning
- monitoring the progress of boys carefully to ensure no gap develops between their achievement and that of girls.

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

Christine Raeside
Her Majesty's Inspector