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Mr A Wilde
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Dear Mr Wilde

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 27 and 28 November 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; observations of eleven lessons and one shorter lesson visit.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

Achievement in English is good.

- Attainment in English language GCSE was well above average in 2011, though it dipped in 2012 to broadly in line with national figures. In 2012 the gap in the average points score of students eligible for pupil premium funding and others was less than that found nationally, approximately half a grade at English GCSE. Data for 2013 indicate that attainment in both English Language and Literature at GCSE has risen very strongly. The percentage of students achieving A* to C in English Language has risen by over sixteen percentage points to eighty-five per cent. Similar gains have been made in English Literature. Students have made much better progress, including those eligible for pupil premium funding.
- Most students make at least expected gains in AS and A level English literature. However, there has been some variability in outcomes over

time. In 2012, achievement at A level was broadly average. In 2013, students achieved less well at AS level than expected. School leaders have taken vigorous action to address this, including the introduction of an induction week for prospective Year 12 students, additional one-to-one support and a sharper focus on the requirements of examination units. As a result, students are already making more decisive gains in their learning.

- Students demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and are keen to succeed. A focus by leaders on improving provision in Key Stage 3 is building on this and driving more rapid progress for all groups of students.

Teaching in English is good.

- Teachers have secure subject knowledge and students have justifiable confidence in their commitment and skills. Teachers plan lessons which are well-resourced and engaging. For example, in a Year 12 English Literature lesson, students made rapid gains in their knowledge and understanding. The teacher's precise questioning and clarity of explanation enabled students to confidently explore challenging ideas. In a Year 10 English lesson, a well-structured activity enabled students to make quick gains in their understanding through paired discussion and analysis of a GCSE play text.
- Students can explain their targets and the progress they are making. They value the time taken by teachers to discuss their work and to provide additional help when needed. Teachers mark work very regularly and provide helpful and supportive comments. However, teachers do not always give feedback which is precise enough. As a result, some students are unclear about how to improve their work.
- In the most effective lessons, teachers make effective use of a range of strategies to motivate and challenge students. They target questions, so that all students are given appropriate levels of stretch and challenge. Independent learning activities are carefully planned and introduced, so that students know what is expected and learn from each other.

The curriculum in English is good.

- The curriculum provides an appropriate balance and breadth of study. There is a clear focus on developing literacy skills across the curriculum, including improving the quality of students' writing. Students gain an understanding of the influence of major writers and particularly enjoy the poetry schemes of work. Planned opportunities to study the influence of the media and to develop speaking and listening skills also engage their interest and develop their understanding of culture and society. Students, including those eligible for pupil premium and Year 7 'catch-up' funding, value the extra help given through booster classes, one-to-one support and additional resources provided.
- The importance of reading is promoted well. Teachers encourage students to read actively. The school is well-resourced, with separate libraries for Key Stages 3, 4 and 5. As a result, many students show enjoyment of reading; one avid reader described the library for Years 7 and 8 as 'cosy

and inviting'. Students in the sixth form value the school's 'Book Club', which offers opportunities to discuss engaging and challenging fiction.

- The school provides a range of enrichment activities and the English department has a high profile in promoting competitions, theatre trips and cultural events to engage students. Students have recently won awards from their entries to the local Mayor's short story writing and public speaking competitions.

Leadership and management of English are good.

- The head of department and key stage leaders have provided stable and effective leadership over time. The department has a good balance of more experienced teachers and those new to the profession. All staff share the same strong commitment to ensuring the best outcomes for students. All are fully prepared to 'go the extra mile', working cohesively to drive improvement. The head of Key Stage 4 has demonstrated significant impact in leading a programme to raise achievement at GCSE.
- Members of the senior team have consistently high expectations of staff and students, and a clear picture of the strengths and areas for development. They base this on regular monitoring and tracking of student progress. This includes formal lesson observations, lesson drop-ins and spot checks on students' books. Priorities for teachers' professional development are closely linked to this rigorous process.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that all teachers give precise feedback to students about how to improve their work, and evaluate the impact this has on improving students' skills
- raising achievement further in English Literature at AS and A level.

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

Russell Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector