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Matthew Butler  
Principal  
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Dear Mr Butler

### **Ofsted 2013–14 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 January 2014 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 ten lessons, eight of which were jointly observed with senior staff.

### **The overall effectiveness of English is good.**

#### **Achievement in English is good.**

- From their low starting points, students make good progress and attain GCSE results that are in line with the national average. Many students make outstanding progress in English language and attain GCSE results in this area that are above average. Results in English literature are not as high because students are not yet reading widely and often enough.
- The most able students and those with special educational needs who are supported by school action plus, do not make as much progress as others. While those eligible for support from the pupil premium (government funding) achieve in line with similar groups nationally, they are not progressing as well as others within the school.

- To improve the achievement of these students, the school has appointed an additional teacher to provide smaller classes, and a higher level teaching assistant to support the students in their English lessons. The support was seen to be effective.
- Improvements in the quality of teaching promote students' good behaviour. Most students are interested and engaged in their English lessons, and contribute confidently to them. They say they particularly enjoy working together and that some act as 'lead learners' in making sure their groups produce work that is of good quality.

### **Teaching in English is good.**

- Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge. They use a range of effective teaching styles and resources, such as modelling new skills on interactive whiteboards, to promote students' good achievement over time.
- They deploy teaching assistants well to support students with low prior attainment or special educational needs. Many make as much progress as their peers, although some need more specialised support.
- Teachers set expectations at different levels or grades in sharing 'success criteria' with the students. Students know their target levels or grades and, through feedback in teachers' marking, they know what to do to improve their work. In the most successful lessons, students are motivated by additional challenges.
- Not all teachers assess students' understanding enough during lessons and adapt their questions, activities and the pace to ensure consistently good progress for all. In addition, they are not all asking probing questions to deepen students' understanding and extend their responses, especially for the most able.

### **The curriculum in English is good.**

- With the introduction of an English literature course for all students in Key Stage 4 in this current year, the curriculum is now broad and balanced. It includes drama, media technology and a renewed emphasis on wider reading. For example, a reading programme has been reintroduced across the school and students now have regular library lessons, although these are not yet structured enough to ensure they contribute to students' good progress.
- The academy operates a two-year Key Stage 3 curriculum for students in Years 7 and 8, while those in Year 9 start their GCSE courses. Year 7 catch-up funding has been used in a very innovative way to provide a base for Year 7 students only. Students with low prior attainment are taught by primary trained teachers, while others are taught by specialists. Students were seen to be making rapid progress in reading and writing.
- The academy has recently appointed an assistant principal to lead on developing literacy skills systematically across subjects. In addition, the

English department provides support for some other departments and is preparing cross-subject reading lists for students.

- A variety of enrichment activities effectively enhances work in English and enables students to see the relevance of the subject. The range includes debating, visits from authors and theatre groups, a visit from the BBC and trips to bookshops for those achieving awards.
- Schemes of work for Key Stage 3 are all online and include interesting resources. The English team is currently reviewing schemes of work for Key Stage 4 to ensure a good balance of language and literature, and to increase the opportunities for students to attain A\* and A grades.

### **Leadership and management of English are good.**

- Good subject leadership is seen in the provision of clear direction for the English team to raise standards. High expectations are set out in the department's development plan and English handbook.
- The English subject leader is securing consistently good teaching and learning by engaging teachers in coaching each other, in working together on schemes of work, and in sharing good practice, for example in the quality of feedback and marking of students' work. Non-negotiable features of lessons have been agreed, and are deployed across the department, such as sharing 'success criteria' with the students.
- English is improving well and the capacity for further improvement is good. This is due to effective teaching and the robust systems that are in place for tracking students' progress and for staff performance management.
- A good range of strategies is used to monitor and evaluate provision in English. The range includes analysis of regularly updated information about students' attainment and progress, lesson observations, scrutiny of students' work and a survey completed by students. It also includes examination of schemes of work.
- Self-evaluation is accurate in identifying the most important priorities for improvement, such as the progress of students supported by school action plus, an increase in the number of students attaining the top grades, and the promotion of wider reading. The priorities inform appropriate action in the department's development plan, which results in the upward trend in students' achievement.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- Increasing the proportion of good and outstanding teaching, by:
  - assessing students' progress more during lessons and adapting questions, activities and the pace to promote good progress for all
  - asking probing questions to extend students' understanding and responses, especially for the most able students

- raising achievement evenly for all students throughout the school, and particularly in reading and responding to texts
- reviewing curriculum planning at Key Stage 4 to promote consistently good progress in English language and literature.

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.

Yours sincerely

**Sue Frater**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**