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Mrs S Wardlow
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Wardlow

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 3 and 4 March 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 10 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is outstanding.

Achievement in English is outstanding.

- Students' rapid progress in English means that, from average starting points, they attain highly in both GCSE English Language and English Literature. A small minority of students makes slightly slower progress during Years 8 and 9, but this accelerates during Key Stage 4. As a result, the proportions of Year 10 and 11 students currently at the school who are on track to make expected or more than expected progress by the end of the key stage are very high.
- Students' achievement in reading is particularly strong. In every year group students make excellent progress in reading, especially in the skills of textual analysis and interpretation. Students read widely and develop a love of reading. Students also achieve highly in speaking and listening and writing. Very occasionally teachers' expectations of Key Stage 3 students' written presentation and the amount they write are not high enough.

- Students for whom English is an additional language, and disabled students and those with special educational needs make similar progress to other students. The most able students achieve extremely well.
- Gaps in the achievement between students eligible for the pupil premium and other students have been too large in the past. (Pupil premium is additional funding for those known to be eligible for free school meals, those with parents in the services, and 'looked after' children.) A range of effective extra support has been introduced to address this, including extra literacy support and small group or individual tuition. Consequently, these gaps in achievement are closing very rapidly.

Teaching in English is outstanding.

- Teachers have high expectations of students and set them challenging tasks which interest them. Teachers ensure that students have a clear understanding of what they need to do to be successful in lessons. Students challenge themselves and each other effectively. In a Year 9 English lesson, for example, students worked together enthusiastically to deepen their understanding of Lord Capulet's character in 'Romeo and Juliet'.
- The vast majority of students enjoy English and value teachers' excellent subject knowledge and expertise. Students work hard in lessons, concentrate very well, and are hungry to achieve highly. Frequently, there is a 'buzz' of learning in lessons.
- Teachers' marking is regular and detailed. Students value this feedback and know what they need to do to improve their work. Occasionally, however, students are not given sufficient opportunities to make these improvements.
- Teachers check on students' progress very regularly during lessons. They question students well and give them further support when needed. Teachers also take special care to make sure that students eligible for the pupil premium are making enough progress in lessons, providing them with extra help when required. Teaching assistants make an important contribution to students' achievement in lessons.

The curriculum in English is outstanding.

- The curriculum provides students with a rich and diverse experience of language, literature and media texts. The balance between contemporary and classic texts is excellent. Teachers' planning and schemes of work enshrine the high level of challenge given to students. Assessments in reading, writing and speaking and listening are regular and detailed.
- The grouping of students into sets, including a consideration of class sizes, is flexible and varies in each year group. This is done to help meet the specific needs of different groups of students and tracking of students' progress indicates that it has a tangibly positive impact on students' achievement.

- There is a range of stimulating extra-curricular opportunities that enhance students' achievement, including a debating club, an advanced reading club, and writing competitions which are popular with the students. GCSE Media Studies is also offered as an option after school in Year 9 and 10. Fortnightly lessons for Key Stage 3 students in the very well-resourced and well managed Learning Resource Centre contribute strongly to students' reading development.

Leadership and management of English are outstanding.

- The subject leader for English, also an assistant headteacher, is a very effective leader. She leads by example in her teaching, has extremely good subject knowledge, and is passionate about English. As a result, this is a thriving English department. She is well supported and challenged by you and other senior leaders.
- Thorough, regular and accurate checks on teachers' performance mean that teachers are held strongly to account for the achievement of students. Leaders rightly track students' achievement in great detail and ensure that teachers take swift action to prevent students from underachieving.
- The subject leader strives for continual improvement in teaching and students' achievement. The department action plan focuses sharply on appropriate priorities in order to achieve this. All members of the English department are highly involved in gauging the department's progress and in bringing about improvements.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- always giving students regular opportunities to make improvements to their work following the advice of their teachers
- ensuring that expectations of students' written presentation and the amount they write are consistently high in all year groups.

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

Matthew Haynes
Her Majesty's Inspector