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Mr Paul Ward
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Ward

Ofsted 2014–15 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 12 and 13 May 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: discussion with you and with the deputy head with responsibility for teaching and learning, with the head of faculty and the second in the faculty, with teachers, the librarian and students. I observed seven lessons, two jointly with the head of faculty. I looked at students' work in folders and displays. I reviewed a range of documents, including the faculty's information about students' progress and attainment, schemes of work and programmes of professional development for teachers and support staff.

The overall effectiveness of English is outstanding.

Achievement in English is outstanding.

- The progress made by all groups in this non-selective academy is impressive. In 2013, 91% of your academy's students made expected or better progress in English, compared to the national average of 69%.
- Attainment is higher than average and still improving. In 2013, 90% gained A* to C for English Language, against a national average of 67%. Marks banked for this year's coursework indicate that results in 2014 will continue the upward trend. Results for English Literature have not been as strong, and the faculty is tackling this through an energetically managed

reading programme and greater emphasis on the skills and the range of knowledge needed for literary analysis and commentary.

- Most striking is the progress made by vulnerable students and those eligible for free school meals. In 2013, 96% of these students made expected or better progress, far exceeding progress made by students as a whole nationally. Meticulous tracking of the progress made by these students and close, sympathetic co-operation between teachers ensure that potential problems are quickly identified. Prompt action then gives each student support closely matched to his or her needs. As one student commented: 'They make it very specific towards you.'
- Students are keen to live up to the high expectations you and your teachers have for them. They respond enthusiastically to challenge; for example, Year 7 students clearly relish tackling the themes and interaction between characters in 'Hamlet'. Students are mutually supportive, working well in groups, sharing ideas and learning from each other. Older students help younger ones to build skills and confidence, especially in reading. With quiet authority, for example, a Year 9 girl was reinforcing good practice for a Year 7 student: 'Remember how we do it. Look for evidence in what we've just read.'

Teaching in English is outstanding.

- Students' outstanding progress is evidence of excellent teaching. Key strengths include: breadth and depth of subject knowledge, communicated with infectious enthusiasm; continual sharing of good practice; mutual trust and respect between teachers, learning support staff and students; flexibility of approach; well-judged use of technology and a variety of media; and constructive use of information about students' progress and standards to ensure that planning and teaching meet all needs. Teachers' comments on students' written work combine encouragement with specific guidance, often posing questions for students about content and use of language, with time given for students to reflect and respond.
- On occasion, the time allocated to an activity does not match students' rate of working or their ability to sustain concentration, and the way questions are phrased suggests to students that there is one preferred answer, limiting their thinking. The most able students are not always challenged to develop their initial responses in greater depth.

The curriculum in English is outstanding.

- Students' evident enjoyment indicates how well the faculty gears the curriculum to their interests and learning styles. Care is taken to ensure that when students join Year 7 their understanding of basic literacy skills is assessed and reinforced, not as a separate line of learning but through the exploration of engaging texts and what one Key Stage 3 student described as 'creative discussion'. Your decision to invest in an intensive programme to encourage Year 7 and Year 8 students to read daily and to tackle increasingly challenging books is successfully increasing students' motivation and improving their confidence and skills as readers.

- A range of high quality fiction, poetry and drama forms the core of the English curriculum. The librarians contribute to the reading programme by ensuring that there is a range of accessible and challenging books, particularly fiction, and by giving advice and support to readers across the ability range. The stock of lively and modern non-fiction is less extensive and does not so strongly support reading across subjects.
- The faculty is currently reviewing its curriculum in the light of impending changes to the National Curriculum and to GCSE assessment. The decision to enter most students for the International General Certificate of Education (IGCSE) in English Language has been justified by results, with strengths in speaking and listening contributing to the overall marks.
- The mainstream curriculum is well supported by a programme of off-site events, such as visits to The Globe Theatre, as well as sessions run by visiting writers and theatre groups at Redden Court. The Creative Writing Group is especially enterprising and productive. Pupils across the ability range choose to participate and find the experience worthwhile; they like being able to 'express what I am feeling in a productive way' ... 'be as creative as you please'...'experiment with English'.

Leadership and management of English are outstanding.

- A clear and ambitious vision for English is shared at all levels. You and your senior leaders are supportive and also present sustained challenge, to which the head of faculty and her team respond with enthusiasm and expertise.
- The Head of Faculty is knowledgeable, lively and collegiate in her approach. She models best practice in her own teaching, uses assessment data effectively to ensure that all pupils make good or better progress, and is developing the expertise and strengthening the commitment of staff through well-delegated responsibilities.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- building on recent curriculum developments to ensure that the faculty is well placed to meet changing GCSE and Key Stage 3 requirements
- ensuring that more able students are more consistently challenged to develop their initial responses to higher levels and in greater depth.

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

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector