

30 October 2006

Mrs G Davies
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Dear Mrs Davies

Ofsted survey inspection programme – English and ICT

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my joint visit with David Cox on 4-6 October to look at work in English and ICT.

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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at English the visit had a particular focus on the provision for poetry. In ICT, the visit had a particular focus on the assessment of ICT and the readiness of the school for the onscreen Key Stage 3 ICT test.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be good. The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be satisfactory.

English

The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in English are good.

- Standards on entry to the school are broadly average.

- At the end of Key Stage 3, students' attainment in English is above average and compares well with other core subjects.
- At the end of Key Stage 4, students' results in both English language and literature are above average for both boys and girls. Students, especially boys, perform better than in some other subjects.
- Students make good progress in Key Stages 3 and 4.
- Most students make good progress in the sixth form and successfully pass their course.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning in English is good with some excellent features.

- Teachers' subject knowledge is good.
- Lessons are well planned with clear structures that enable learning.
- Teaching methods engage students and provide opportunities for collaboration and individual work.
- There is a consistent approach to marking. Feedback to students is clear, helpful and focused on improvement.
- Assessment is well integrated into schemes of work and teachers assess systematically against clear criteria, making good use of curricular and individual targets.
- Assessment of learning in lessons is sound but teachers do not always recognise opportunities to challenge the most able students.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- Provision for English is broad and balanced. The schemes of work cater well for the needs of students and present imaginative opportunities for them to experience all areas of learning within the subject.
- The relationship between the curriculum and students' capacity to develop as thoughtful individuals with a sense of self and others is well understood and reflected in students' positive response.
- The use of ICT as a tool to support students' learning and independence is an area for development.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management are good.

- The head of department provides good leadership. She is an effective practitioner and models many aspects of good practice.
- Teamwork is cohesive and committed to improving students' learning.
- The analysis of students' performance is detailed and contributes to a good quality of self evaluation.

- Monitoring and evaluation are thorough and involve strategies such as reviewing planning, lesson observation and the scrutiny of students' work.
- The department is well managed with clear procedures and an appropriate emphasis on review and reflection. However, the improvement plan lacks detailed strategies and specific success criteria.

Subject issue

Provision for poetry is good.

- Poetry is valued and given importance within the curriculum.
- There are good opportunities for students to engage with poetry. They are encouraged to think analytically and extend their understanding of the deepest levels of human feeling and experience.
- Students enjoy sharing the different points of view provoked by discussion of poetry. They also like to write their own poetry.
- There was a marked difference in the attitudes of the boys and girls at Key Stage 4; boys were less enthusiastic and commented that they found it difficult to engage with poems without a strong narrative thread.
- Sixth formers were particularly enthusiastic about studying poetry.

Inclusion

Inclusion in English is good.

- The inclusion of all learners is central to the work of the department.
- There is a strong commitment to ensuring that all learners realise their potential. This is reflected in good achievement and in the quality of care and guidance given.
- The curriculum and teaching methods are sensitive to a range of learning needs and styles.
- Teachers and support staff provide good role models that challenge stereotypes.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- enhancing teachers' capacity to evaluate learning in lessons so that they recognise when to challenge students to improve good progress to excellent
- creating opportunities for students to develop their independence in learning, particularly in Key Stage 3
- developing the use of ICT as a tool to support students' learning and independence.

ICT

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in ICT are satisfactory.

- Standards in ICT are average. Students' progress is satisfactory and by the end of Year 11, most students are confident users of ICT.
- At Key Stage 4, whilst the percentage of students' gaining an A* to C grade at GCSE is above average, more able students' are not always challenged sufficiently in ICT lessons.
- The development of students' ICT capability is inconsistent across the curriculum and is dependent upon the expertise of their individual subject teachers.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning in ICT is satisfactory.

- ICT teachers have a good knowledge of their subject, particularly the requirements of the vocational examinations. This helps students to gain high marks in their coursework.
- Occasionally teaching is too teacher led which prevents students from being creative or independent learners.
- Tasks are not well matched to the needs of all students. Activities do not always challenge the most able.
- Good use is made of the support provided by the ICT technical staff.
- Students mostly work hard. However, occasionally they display unsatisfactory attitudes, which disrupt their learning.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Students enjoy many elements of the curriculum, particularly control systems and data logging.
- About one third of students do not study ICT at Key Stage 4. These students' have many other opportunities to use ICT but their experiences are not audited effectively.
- Students enjoy using the ICT facilities, particularly after school to complete their homework. The school is in the early stages of developing a virtual learning environment and students currently have no access to their work or support materials from home.

- Teachers from across the school are beginning to integrate ICT into their lessons to enable students to apply their ICT capability in new contexts as well as supporting students' progress in ICT.

Leadership and management of ICT

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- The head of department has many good ideas and is supported well by other staff from within the department. Together with the strong commitment from senior leaders he has helped the school to make considerable progress with ICT developments since the last inspection.
- Whilst the school has a reasonably accurate picture of standards and the progress of students within discrete ICT provision, there is a tendency to over estimate the quality of teaching and its impact on students' achievement.
- The monitoring of students' ICT experiences and performance across the school is limited.

Assessment of ICT and the readiness of the school for the onscreen Key Stage 3 ICT test

Assessment is satisfactory.

- The regular assessments enable teachers to provide good support and encouragement for students. However, current systems tend to over estimate how well students are achieving in ICT.
- The school is well prepared for the onscreen Key Stage 3 ICT test. However, the school was disappointed with this year's results as many students achieved at least one level lower than predicted.

Inclusion

Inclusion is satisfactory.

- All students benefit from opportunities to use the school's computers outside of lesson times. This ensures that none are disadvantaged when completing homework or research. More able students do not always make the same progress as other students because their tasks are not always demanding enough.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included to:

- provide more challenge for the most able students
- monitor students' ICT experiences across the curriculum to ensure that they receive their statutory entitlement
- review the accuracy and rigor of assessment systems

- continue to develop the virtual learning environment so that students' have greater remote access to materials to support their school work.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop English and ICT in the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline White
Her Majesty's Inspector