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Mrs Grabowski
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Dear Mrs Grabowski

Ofsted survey inspection programme - English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 30-31 October 2006 to inspect work in English.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject the visit had a particular focus on our current survey theme: provision for poetry. 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.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in English are outstanding.

- Standards are very high as a result of high expectations, excellent teaching and the robust monitoring of pupils' progress.
- The Contextual Value Added scores (CVA) for English at Key Stage 3 were significantly better than for schools nationally. Conversion rates for lower attaining pupils were better in English than in other core subjects.
- Many groups of pupils make better than average progress. In 2005, boys did particularly well at Key Stage 3 as did pupils whose first language is not English. Other groups who made exceptional progress included pupils with learning difficulties, those with English as an additional language and pupils of Black African heritage.

- At GCSE, over half of the pupils achieved A* to C including functional English. This is better than the national picture.
- The school's data confirms that achievement in English is excellent.

Quality of teaching and learning in English

The quality of teaching and learning in English are outstanding.

- Teachers have first-rate subject knowledge, explain concepts clearly and present pupils with excellent modeling of oral and written work. Consistent support and guidance encourages pupils and enables them to construct well crafted texts. Teachers work exceptionally hard to support pupils in the preparation for examinations and show a high level of care and concern.
- Assessment is thorough and helps pupils to improve their grades substantially. Marking is generally very good and it is excellent at Key Stage 4. Pupils take good note of this advice ensuring that their work shows rapid and significant improvement. Consequently, they make greater progress than would be predicted from prior attainment.
- Very productive relationships, based on mutual respect, lead to well-run classes where pupils enjoy their work and develop effective learning strategies.
- In some classes there was imaginative use of interactive white boards that appealed to the visual and aural senses and enhanced the learning experience.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding.

- The curriculum is very well suited to the pupils' ages and situation. New texts bought in over the last few years appeal to a wide range of tastes. They provide a very good diet of classic and modern authors and afford pupils a glimpse into many different times, places and ways of viewing the world.
- Schemes of work allow for innovation and creativity by talented and experienced staff while also supporting them with very effective teaching materials.
- The school has thought carefully about the pupils' personal situations and has ensured that there are opportunities for students to access computers and to have opportunities to do their homework.
- Extra-curricular provision is commendable. Visits to theatres and newspaper offices make excellent use of the local environment. Exceptional provision is made to help those with gaps in their knowledge to catch up and to help able pupils to extend their studies in the many additional sessions available.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management in English are outstanding.

- The Head of Department is confident, enthusiastic and passionate about English. She is exceptionally well organised and documentation is exemplary.
- Teachers are exceptionally well supported and have a clear sense of direction. Team work is important and effective.
- The subject action plan is based on an accurate analysis of data and feedback from staff and pupils. The school holds an excellent amount of data and is working at ways of improving its usefulness.
- Monitoring has been regular but has focused on behaviour management and teaching skills rather than on the pupils' learning.
- The progress that pupils make, their enjoyment of English and the high quality of subject leadership provide a very good basis for further improvement.

Provision for poetry

Provision for poetry is good.

- Poetry is taught systematically across both key stages and provision is equally effective for all groups of pupils. The range of poems on offer is wide and reflects the multi-cultural nature of society well.
- Teaching at Key Stage 4 enables pupils to analyse poems most effectively, but coursework constraints limit the amount of time they spend on writing their own poetry.
- Younger pupils particularly enjoyed learning to analyse poetry and could discuss the stylistic devices that poets use.

Inclusion

Inclusion in English is outstanding.

- Achievement is very good overall with boys performing well in relation to national expectations.
- Pupils with specific language needs receive good support and make excellent progress.
- The pupils' good behaviour is based upon, and enhanced by, the school's Catholic philosophy. Pupils get on well with each other and this means that teaching and learning proceed without hindrance.
- The effective use of a commercial reading and comprehension scheme and the support of adults from local businesses working with individuals help low attaining pupils to improve their literacy skills.

- Saturday morning and after school sessions enable all students to take advantage of the exceptional teaching available within the school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- focusing monitoring on the pupils' learning
- developing further the use of data analysis.

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

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority/Local Learning Skills Council. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term and made available to the team for the next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Cathie Munt
Her Majesty's Inspector