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Dear Mr Gledhill

Ofsted survey inspection programme - English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 5-6 December 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, analysis of pupils' work and observation of seven lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be satisfactory; this reflects recent improvements and a good capacity to improve.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in English are inadequate.

- Standards in English are low on entry to the school and remain below average at the end of both key stages. However, the unvalidated Key Stage 3 results for 2006 are better than previous years'. GCSE results for 2006 were not as good as in 2005; however, performance in English was significantly better than in the other core subjects.
- The gap between boys' and girls' attainment in English at GCSE is significantly wider than the national average and reflects under-achievement by boys.
- PANDA and other data show that achievement in English has been poor over recent years. Pupils have not achieved as well as they

should. However, pupils achieved much better in the most recent Key Stage 3 results and this suggests that a corner has been turned.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning in English is good.

- Teaching in English has been negatively affected by staffing problems, lack of stability and illness; these factors have contributed to low levels of achievement in the past.
- Teaching in English is currently good. This was confirmed both by observations during the inspection and discussion with pupils.
- The strengths of teaching observed include: very good relationships with pupils, good classroom management, and an emphasis on developing pupils' self-confidence through constant encouragement. Teachers also model the writing process very effectively for pupils.
- Opportunities were missed in lessons to develop pupils' speaking and listening, allowing some pupils to remain too passive.
- There are some strengths in assessment. The department sets, standardises and moderates half-termly test for pupils. This enables it to track pupils' progress closely. Pupils are given curricular targets in reading and writing and informed about what's needed to move up a level. Some marking is good quality. However, feedback from teachers, including through the targets, is not clear enough to enable pupils to understand how to improve their work in the short term.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- The scheme of work for Key Stage 3 has been improved. The current scheme builds in progression, identifies the pupils' entitlement clearly and has some positive additional features such as the promotion of independent reading and the teaching of specific literacy units.
- However, there are gaps at present in areas such as drama, media work and ICT. In particular, there is limited explicit planning for pupils' speaking and listening skills.
- The impact of the curriculum at Key Stage 4 is limited by the below average numbers of pupils, especially boys, who are entered for English Literature. However, the department has introduced Media Studies at GCSE and this will be taken by some pupils who are not considered to be suitable for the Literature course. A media course is also available for students who wish to study post-16.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management in English are satisfactory.

- Although there are strengths in leadership and management, overall this is no better than satisfactory in view of low standards and poor achievement in the past.
- The senior leaders have responded well to whole school weaknesses in literacy and put in place a number of sensible strategies. The school also has an accurate view of English, showing good self-evaluation.
- The department is clearly improving and this is shown in the better 2006 results. The head of department, supported by teachers, has worked hard to improve schemes of work and guidance for staff. There is a good sense of team work within the department and teachers show significant commitment to pupils' learning.
- The department has a good understanding of areas for improvement.
- The department now has a settled and potentially strong team. The current capacity to improve is good and early signs of improvement can be noted in the 2006 results.

Provision for poetry

Provision for poetry is satisfactory.

- Pupils' attitudes towards poetry are mixed but appear to decline as they get older. This is reflected in low levels of entry for English Literature.
- Many pupils do not like poetry because it confuses them: "I just don't get it", one girl said.
- Pupils' experience of poetry at Key Stage 3 has been limited and this accounts for some of their negative views. Pupils have had few opportunities to write their own poems. This is likely to improve since the new scheme of work for Key Stage 3 includes annual poetry units.

Inclusion

Inclusion in English is inadequate; this reflects poor progress by pupils.

- There has been significant under-achievement by boys in English.
- Current provision is better. Pupils enjoy English and teaching is of a consistent quality. All teachers work very hard to build up pupils' confidence, especially the less able.
- Support for less able pupils is provided through a wide range of strategies including very small class sizes, withdrawal for individual help, a work-related curriculum at Key Stage 4 and the establishment of a Year 7 nurture group.
- Very good out-of-school help is provided for targeted pupils through initiatives such as the weekend revision conference with PE.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards generally and boys' achievement in particular
- developing the role of speaking and listening, including drama
- providing a richer experience of poetry as Key Stage 3
- extending pupils' understanding of strengths and weaknesses in their work.

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

Philip Jarrett HMI
Her Majesty's Inspector