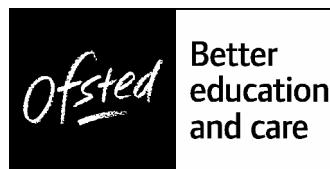


Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
F 020 7421 6644
www.ofsted.gov.uk



10 November 2006

Mrs Halsall
The Headteacher
Rainford High School
Higher Lane
Rainford
St Helens
WA11 8NY

Dear Mrs Halsall

Ofsted survey inspection programme - English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 08–09 November 2006 to look at 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 twelve lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in English are satisfactory.

- Achievement is satisfactory in the main school and good in the sixth form. Attainment on entry is above average, as are standards in examinations at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Pupils of average ability do well. The progress of more able pupils is variable.
- 2005 results at GCSE and in end of Key Stage 3 tests were above average but the proportions gaining the higher grades were disappointing. GCSE Literature results were well below those in Language. 2006 Literature results were much better. They were in line with Language results, which also improved. 2006

results in the Key Stage 3 tests showed some decline and targets were not met.

- Pupils become skilled in discussion, and in writing neat, accurate, lengthy English under timed conditions. Their writing, however, does not always focus sufficiently on what the title or task requires them to do. Few pupils read widely in their own time.
- Attitudes to English are good but variable. Pupils work with confidence and diligence but too many lack enthusiasm for the subject.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Lessons are well planned to link to the scheme of work although some objectives are too vague to help pupils see the purpose of the lesson.
- Marking is regular and valued by pupils for its helpful advice and useful improvement targets. Teachers increasingly share success criteria with pupils.
- Pair and group discussion is well used in many lessons. Class discussion is more varied in quality because some teachers have limited strategies for engaging quiet or inattentive pupils.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and lessons are competent but sometimes dull or limited in scope.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Schemes of work are clear and balanced but coverage of media, ICT and wider reading are vague at Key Stage 3 so that pupils' experience is variable.
- Top set pupils benefit from being able to take GCSE English literature early.
- The post-16 curriculum, offering language, literature and media courses, has a good range of options.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- The department is well organised and cohesive. Administration is clear and efficient.
- The head of department makes effective use of data analysis and work scrutiny to check how the department is doing in some aspects of its work.
- The quality of teaching and learning is not improving quickly enough because there is no regular and rigorous system to monitor lessons and encourage good practice to be shared.

- Development planning is not crisp enough. The focus on raising standards is not central to it. Resources, responsibility, and success criteria are not clear.

Provision for poetry

Provision for poetry is good.

- Teachers and pupils enjoy poetry, sharing an enthusiasm for it.
- Pupils have good knowledge of styles and techniques, and can apply them to their own poetry writing.
- The scheme of work ensures progression and a good range of poetry study.
- There are good displays of work, but there are missed opportunities because pupils' poetry is neither regularly celebrated nor published.

Inclusion

Inclusion in English is satisfactory.

- The most able pupils do not progress consistently enough. Everyday teaching does not have a strong enough focus on how to extend their achievement.
- There are high entry levels at GCSE for both Language and Literature.
- There are no significant gender issues.
- Minority inattention and misbehaviour limit learning in some lessons.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increasing the proportion of pupils gaining the highest grades in end of Key Stage 3 tests and at GCSE
- extending the range and appropriateness to purpose of teaching styles, so that more lessons are imaginative and stimulating
- making sure that the rationale for media, ICT, and library/wider reading work is clearer in Key Stage 3 schemes of work to ensure consistent provision.

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

Jon Lövgreen
Additional Inspector