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Mr Atkinson  
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Dear Mr Atkinson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on the 12-13 December 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 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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement in English is good. Standards are well below average in Key Stage 3 and below average in Key Stage 4.

- On joining the school, the attainment of most students in all areas of English is well below average. Over half of the students have a home language that is not English and of these a significant proportion are at the early stages of learning English.
- In 2005, standards were well below average at the end of both key stages. Girls performed better than boys in both English language and literature GCSE. There is a wide gap between the reading skills of boys and girls in Key Stage 3.
- In 2006, national test results show that standards at the end of Key Stage 3 remain well below average. However, unvalidated data

indicates that standards at the end of Key Stage 4 improved significantly with the proportion of students achieving higher GCSE grades in English language increasing from 27% to 54%.

- GCSE results in 2006 and lesson observations indicate that students are now making good progress including those with English as an additional language. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities also make good progress.
- Students are well supported. Strong, positive relationships with staff are a key factor in their good personal development and achievement. The progress of individual students is evaluated carefully. The good systems for tracking progress have identified that some students, including some of the most able, are not yet realising their full potential. This is because, given their starting points, it is a challenging task to catch up. The subject team is working hard to ensure interventions are precise enough to help students fill the gaps in their learning and achieve their demanding targets.

### Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning is good with some outstanding features.

- The school has experienced difficulty in recruiting to the faculty in the recent past. However, it is now fully staffed with an established leadership structure.
- Where teaching is at its best, students' interest is captured with imaginative approaches to the subject. Teachers are highly effective in developing students' speaking and listening skills, have exacting expectations of all and create a climate which enables students to take risks, participate and enjoy learning.
- Lessons are very well planned. The faculty has developed a shared approach that is consistently implemented.
- A good range of activities was used in lessons observed to help students consolidate and apply learning.
- Teachers evaluate learning in lessons effectively. Consequently, most students are clear about what they need to do to improve. Where practice is excellent, expertise is used to build students' skills sequentially and give helpful, timely feedback to ensure very good progress.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The English faculty works effectively to provide students with a curriculum that meets their needs. Schemes of work have been reviewed and improved. In Years 7-9 they are imaginative and based on a good understanding of language acquisition. The faculty's creative interpretation of GCSE requirements enables students to write for a

range of purposes and in different styles. Resources are well designed to create a bridge with students' experiences to engage and then extend them.

- The curriculum is responsive to different learning styles. The variety of teaching methods helps students to consolidate their learning. Lesson activities are founded on an understanding of the interdependence of communication skills. For example, students are not asked to write without sufficient opportunities to exchange ideas and develop their thinking.

## Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management are good.

- The subject leader is strongly focused on the improvement of students' learning. She has a clear vision for the future that is shared by the faculty. Her passion and commitment are infectious and inspire her team to strive for improvement.
- Teamwork is cohesive. Dialogue about the effectiveness of teaching and learning is central to team meetings. The collaborative approach to development ensures that effective practice is shared.
- Monitoring and evaluation involve strategies such as checking planning, lesson observation and the scrutiny of students' work and these are instrumental in bringing about continuous improvement. Self-evaluation is accurate. Improving outcomes for students is at the heart of the process.

## Subject issue

Provision for poetry is good.

- Poetry is well used in both key stages to develop students' critical and imaginative responses. Consequently, students' enjoy poetry and are able to articulate what they feel they gain from their experience of it.
- A good range of poetry, sensitive to students' diverse backgrounds, is used in English teaching. Students are given scope to respond in a variety of ways including writing their own poetry. The discussion of poetry helps to cultivate students' speaking and listening skills.
- Film and photographs are used particularly well to draw students into the medium of poetry and increase their understanding and appreciation of its power.

## Inclusion

Inclusion in English is good.

- There is a strong commitment to ensuring that all learners achieve well. This is reflected in the high priority given to monitoring progress and responding to underachievement.
- Care is taken to ensure the curriculum reflects the diversity of the school community. Teaching methods are sensitive to a range of learning needs and styles. Individuality is valued and flourishes in the supportive learning environment.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- continuing to improve boys' reading skills in Key Stage 3
- ensuring that intervention strategies address the gaps in student's learning so that all students, but particularly the most able, realise their potential.

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 and Skills Council 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