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Mr Nixon  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Nixon

Ofsted survey inspection programme - English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit with Tricia Metham HMI on 29-30 January 2007 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 they 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement in English is outstanding.

- Pupils enter the school in Year 8 with attainment which is well below average.
- Standards at Key Stage 3 have risen significantly in the last four years and are now in line with the national average.
- By the end of Year 9, pupils make outstanding progress, in the top 5% nationally. Almost all groups make significantly above average progress.

- Standards at Key Stage 4 have also improved over the last two years although they remain below average in English and broadly average in English Literature.
- By the end of Year 11, pupils make outstanding progress, in the top 10% nationally.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes in lessons were unfailingly good and levels of concentration were consistently high.

### Quality of teaching and learning in English

The quality of teaching and learning in English is outstanding.

- Teachers plan lessons thoroughly with clear objectives and a good variety of activities. They have very good subject knowledge, high expectations of pupils and conduct lessons with brisk pace.
- A good range of approaches and questions is used to help pupils learn. However, in some lessons, pupils are not always provided with sufficient opportunities to discuss their ideas and plenary sessions are sometimes rushed.
- Teachers' marking relates well to key objectives and provides pupils with good advice on how to improve their work. The best marking is very thorough.
- Teachers use assessment data effectively to monitor pupils' progress and to identify those who require additional support. Pupils are clear what their targets are and most know what they need to do to improve.
- The very good programme of additional support for pupils' literacy clearly enables pupils to reach improved standards and make the outstanding progress represented in results over the last two years.

### Quality of curriculum

Curriculum provision in English is good.

- Schemes of work are broad and meet statutory requirements.
- Teachers make good choices of texts and resources to match pupils' needs and to provide appropriate levels of challenge.
- Pupils enjoy English lessons and comment on how well they are supported by teachers, including programmes beyond lessons which improve their basic skills and their preparation for examinations.
- There is a good range of activities and events which support and enrich the English curriculum including a school magazine, visiting poet, theatre trips and writing for real purposes.

## Leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are outstanding.

- The head of department sets very high expectations and is firmly focused on raising pupils' achievement. He has a clear vision for the subject and there has been rapid improvement over two years.
- The team of English teachers works together very effectively.
- The development plan is strongly focused on specific strategies for raising achievement. There are very clear policies on teaching and assessment which are used effectively and consistently. The head of department encourages teachers to share ideas and approaches, learning from each other.
- The head of department has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the department and pupils based on detailed analysis of pupils' test papers and regular monitoring of teaching and assessment.

## Provision for poetry

Provision for poetry is good.

- Poetry is clearly established in schemes of work. Teachers enjoy working with poems and some have a real passion for poetry.
- There is a range of approaches to the teaching of poetry and progression is evident through the level of response expected.
- Many pupils like poetry and welcome opportunities to write their own.
- From time to time a selection of pupils' writing is published in the school magazine and poets are invited to work alongside pupils.

## Inclusion

Provision for pupils with a very wide range of needs is outstanding.

- Pupils make at least good progress and usually outstanding progress in English. Boys make a similar level of progress to girls.
- There is a very good range of programmes available to support pupils with specific needs.
- The use of a teacher in the local middle schools to extend approaches to literacy in Year 7 is helping to raise skill levels and build pupils' capabilities.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included to:

- ensure that pupils regularly have opportunity to discuss, share their ideas and opinions, and develop their confidence in managing their own learning

- ensure that plenary sessions are used effectively to assess pupils' progress.

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. 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

Martin Cragg  
Her Majesty's Inspector