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Dr G Berwick
Headteacher
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Dear Dr Berwick

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

It has come to my notice that you did not receive a letter following the visit to your school of Catherine Munt HMI in February to look at work in English. I apologise for this.

The findings were reported to us as follows.

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 lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Standards are above average in English and pupils' achievement is outstanding.

- Standards are very high and have been over time. Despite fluctuations, results at both key stages remain above national and local authority levels.
- The school's results were within the top 20% nationally in 2005 at Key Stage 3.
- At GCSE, over two thirds of the pupils achieved A* to C including functional English. This is significantly better than the national picture placing the school just outside the top third of schools nationally.
- The contextual value added data indicates that progress is good from Key Stage 2 to 4 and outstanding from Key Stage 3 to 4.
- Effective support in classes and in small groups ensures that lower attaining pupils make progress in line with their peers.
- The school's data confirms that achievement is excellent overall.

Quality of teaching and learning in English

The quality of teaching and learning in English is good.

- Teachers are exceptionally committed to the boys' progress as evidenced by the cycle of whole school monitoring that reviews targets every six weeks. They work exceptionally hard to support pupils in the preparation for examinations and share assessment criteria effectively.
- There is evidence of excellent practice by some teachers who support and mentor new staff. This needs to be shared more routinely and widely among the department.
- Teaching observed was good in Key Stage 4 and satisfactory overall in Key Stage 3. In several lessons, the behaviour of the pupils had an adverse impact on the pace of lessons and, consequently, the pupils' learning.
- Some pupils received very limited written feedback from marking. The department's marking schedule is not adhered to consistently and this permits poor practices to continue. This element of assessment is not effective enough at Key Stage 3.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- Comments about curriculum content in the department's review of 2004 have been acted upon suitably. The curriculum covers the expected range of materials and is suited to the pupils' ages and abilities. However, criticisms related to planning remain pertinent.
- The department has started to revise its planning. This is timely because the current schemes of work do not provide sufficient support for staff. In particular, learning objectives are too vague and do not provide the pupils with a clear idea of what they are expected to achieve in some lessons. The department's review accepted that planning should be 'considerably fuller and more detailed'.
- Extra-curricular provision enhances the learning experiences of the boys well. Students were positive about their experiences and enjoyed the opportunities offered to see plays and take part in festivals and competitions.
- Very good provision is made for the most able pupils where early examination entry is the norm at Key Stage 4 and post-16.
- Provision for lower attaining pupils and those with statements of special educational needs is of a very high standard. The coordinator has ensured, for example, that there are opportunities for students to access computers to help them develop basic skills. This supports their progress most effectively across the curriculum.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management in English are good.

- The head of department has focused on improving the accommodation and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) resources of the department in order to enhance the experiences for the pupils and the staff.
- Developing the skills of a changing workforce has taken much of his time and prevented him from monitoring teaching and learning as effectively as he might. This is compounded as he has a heavy commitment to examination classes. This is an area for development as the role currently is more focused on managing the department rather than leading it.
- The English self-evaluation form (SEF) shows a secure understanding of the department's strengths. However, the priorities do not include the development of subject leadership and the SEF does not show evidence that pupils have been involved in providing feedback.
- Moderation of work at Key Stage 4 has promoted consistency in assessment of coursework and provides a useful model for Key Stage 3.
- The school holds an excellent amount of data which are used to determine examination entry and to set targets that are discussed with the pupils at regular intervals. Despite this, some of the targets recorded in students' books are not specific enough.
- The progress that pupils make, the willing attitude of the staff and the revision of the schemes of work provide a sound basis for further improvement.

Provision for poetry

Provision for poetry is good.

- Poetry is taught systematically across both key stages. Key Stage 3 pupils study Chaucer and Shakespeare. At Key Stage 4 more able students study a range of poems including metaphysical poetry. Older pupils express the view that teachers enjoyed poetry and taught it well. However, younger pupils thought that teaching lacked enthusiasm.
- All schemes of work in English include opportunities for pupils to read and write poetry. The department has worked to develop poetry through cross-curricular projects. In addition, pupils' poetry has been promoted through external publications, including live video conferencing.
- Opportunities exist for pupils to write their own poetry at both key stages. Coursework constraints do not limit the amount of time pupils spend on writing their own poetry.

- In lessons teachers need to take more account of pupils' prior knowledge and experience and build this into their planning.

Inclusion

Inclusion in English is outstanding.

- Achievement is very good overall with boys performing very well in relation to national expectations.
- Pupils with specific language needs receive good support and make comparable progress to their peers.
- The effective use of commercial reading schemes, comprehension and touch typing programs, and the efficient use of higher level teaching assistants, trained in literacy, help low attaining pupils to improve their English skills.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- continuing to revise and develop schemes of work
- ensuring that departmental procedures on marking are implemented consistently to give pupils good feedback on their work.

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

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

Scott Harrison
Her Majesty's Inspector