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Mr Blond
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Blond

Ofsted survey inspection programme - English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 05-06 February 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 individual institutions will not be identified in the main text.

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

Standards and achievement

Achievement and standards are outstanding.

- Attainment on entry to the school and in the sixth form is above average.
- Pupils make good progress and standards in all aspects of English are well above national averages at Key Stages 3 and 4, and at post-16.
- Students are confident and highly articulate speakers and demonstrate outstanding ability as active and sustained listeners. They are enthusiastic and highly analytical readers and powerful writers.
- Opportunities for personal development are very good; significantly, through enrichment activities and from extensive opportunities for students to work independently, show initiative, and express their views on a wide range of issues.

- Students' language and literacy skills enable them to make good progress in subjects across the curriculum although writing of good quality is not consistently promoted in displays throughout the school. Plans are in hand for English teachers to work alongside other departments to develop writing skills further.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding.

- Teaching is of very high quality and meets the needs of all students very well.
- Lessons are very well planned and executed, highly demanding and very enjoyable.
- Teachers' excellent subject knowledge and infectious enthusiasm, and a wide range of effective teaching strategies with particularly effective questioning, develops taught skills well, promotes independent learning strongly and stimulates and challenges students to achieve highly.
- Careful and thorough marking alongside self and peer assessment, ensures students know where they are and what they need to do to improve.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding.

- The English curriculum is rich, varied, highly relevant and systematically planned. It provides for intellectual challenge and independent learning very well. A broad range of stimulating enrichment activities extends learning further.
- Technology is used increasingly well to present and develop learning, for research, and for editing and publication.
- Key priorities for improvement are accurately identified in the English improvement plan and within the school's bid for specialist status.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are outstanding.

- The English department has a clear sense of direction. Staff are very hard working, passionate about English and highly analytical.
- Despite its many and considerable strengths, the department is by no means complacent. Rigorous analysis of performance data, regular monitoring of lessons, sampling and moderating written work, targets for individuals, careful tracking of progress and regular feedback from students assures continuous improvement.

- Although entirely cohesive, the department comprises only two full time members, one of whom is a newly qualified teacher. This limits the delegation of responsibility.

Provision for poetry

Provision for poetry is outstanding.

- A wide range of engaging poetry is embedded firmly into schemes of work and progression is systematically developed.
- Students enjoy reading and writing poetry as a result of very enthusiastic and effective teaching.
- They talk about the poets and poems they have read with interest and authority and can reason and justify preferences very well using appropriate terminology.
- Students participate in regular writing workshops with practising poets, publish and perform their work and enter poetry competitions.

Inclusion

Inclusion is outstanding.

- All students enjoy English, engage in demanding tasks, do very well, and are very enthusiastic about, and motivated by, their learning.
- Cultural diversity is valued and celebrated strongly through the English curriculum, in enrichment activities, and through a good range of high quality literature.
- Stimulating and challenging lessons, excellent use of targeted groupwork, effective interventions and rigorous assessment ensure at least good progress.
- Excellent and highly respectful relationships between students and teachers, and between students themselves, contribute to the very positive ethos for learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the quality of writing across the curriculum; and
- addressing the sharing of responsibilities for English across the department.

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

Rosemary Matthews
Her Majesty's Inspector