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Mr I Robertson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Robertson

Ofsted survey inspection programme - English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 06-07 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 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 a number of lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Overall, achievement and standards in English are satisfactory.

- Achievement was significantly below expectations in 2005, marking a sudden downturn in the previous above average standards and trend of improvement. Though early indications are that attainment and achievement improved in 2006, both are lower than in other core subjects. The schools' analysis indicates that pupils and sixth form students made average progress, though middle attaining girls underachieved at GCSE.
- The full range of inspection evidence indicates that most pupils make satisfactory or better progress in reading, writing and speaking and listening.

- Pupils are generally positive about English, and appreciate the help their teachers give them. In some classes they greatly enjoy learning, and develop well as independent and collaborative learners.

### Quality of teaching and learning of English

Teaching is satisfactory overall, reflecting its impact on achievement.

- Most lessons observed were good or better. All teachers form good relationships with pupils and set a brisk pace but, in lessons which were satisfactory, learning was too passive to realise high expectations.
- The best teaching is planned effectively to move pupils towards clearly defined outcomes. These lessons use a good variety of active approaches which engage pupils, such as investigation by pairs or groups. Weaker lessons were too much teacher dominated and tasks lacked challenge for some. Plans lacked clear direction, being focussed on activities rather than learning outcomes. In some cases resources were not readily available.
- Assessment is a strength. Marking usually makes clear why work is good and how to achieve better. Pupils are involved in tracking their progress in all areas of English. Assessment for learning is becoming embedded, though lack of shared success criteria sometimes impedes this.

### Quality of curriculum

The school offers a good English curriculum.

- The scheme of work is progressive and covers the full breadth of English, including media, ICT and speaking and listening, though pupils' work indicates that balance and depth vary between classes.
- There are good examples of support for reading, including tasks which promote close shared reading for meaning, and wide use of topics and texts which meet the needs and interests of pupils.
- The take-up of English language or literature at AS and A level is relatively high. Whilst maintaining a commitment to inclusion, the school is adapting provision through additional setted teaching, compressing Key Stage 3 for most pupils and limiting entry to GCSE Literature.

### Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- The head of English communicates a clear vision for the subject to his committed team of specialist teachers. He models and encourages good practice. He works closely with the coordinators for learning and for pupils

with learning difficulties and disabilities to ensure the full range of needs is met.

- He and senior management have analysed data carefully and self evaluation in the subject makes clear where there is a need for improvement.
- The quality of teaching has been monitored systematically, though not with sufficient rigour or focus on pupils' progress. The subject action plan is consistent with improvement priorities but does not set out clearly the expectations for which all teachers are responsible.

### Provision for poetry

Provision for poetry is good.

- Many pupils enjoy poetry, which is suitably represented in the scheme of work. Pupils remember with pleasure a wide range of poetry, traditional and modern. In some classes, pupils are aware of their progress as readers and writers of poetry, and record their achievements and targets for poetry.
- Pupils of all abilities enjoy stimulating opportunities to discuss and write poetry, and for some this continues into Key Stage 4. However, enjoyment declines in Key Stage 4 as active approaches to investigating meaning and practising the poet's craft are less frequently used.

### Inclusion

Inclusion is satisfactory

- Achievement is satisfactory overall, although some girls have under-performed in recent years at GCSE. The department has contributed well to boosting boys' attainment.
- The department has entered an above average proportion of pupils for exams at GCSE and enables a wide range to enter AS exams in English. It provides good support for pupils through out-of-school coursework and revision classes and extra teaching by an external literacy consultant.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards, especially addressing the decline in girls' performance
- making use of the good practice available in the department to improve teaching generally
- providing more active learning for pupils through wider use of a greater range of strategies such as investigative group work

- more rigorous monitoring and evaluation of teaching to ensure greater consistency.

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

Susan Bowles  
Her Majesty's Inspector