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Mr A Pugh
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Dear Mr Pugh

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 21-22 May 2007 to inspect 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: discussions with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, review of pupils' work and observation of six lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Standards in English are above average. Achievement is good overall.

- Standards are well above average at the end of Key Stage 4 in both English and English Literature. Results compare well with other subjects in the school.
- Standards are not as high at the end of Key Stage 3 and have dipped in recent years. Given that attainment on entry to the school is above average in English, pupils should be achieving more. This view is confirmed by negative contextual value added data over the past two years.

- Pupils achieve more at Key Stage 4 because of better teaching and a more challenging curriculum; this has ensured above average achievement overall during the past two years.
- Boys performed less well than girls in GCSE English last year and the gap between their results was wider than average.

Quality of teaching and learning in English

The quality of teaching and learning in English is good overall but weaker at Key Stage 3.

- Pupils enjoy lessons in English, especially at Key Stage 4 where they respond well to teaching that is often enthusiastic, committed and supportive.
- Test results confirm that teaching is more effective in GCSE. At Key Stage 3, teaching lacks challenge and some lessons are planned too much around activities rather than progress in pupils' learning.
- Lessons are marked by good relationships and effective class management. Teachers show good subject knowledge, especially when teaching literature. They make use of a range of strategies to engage pupils and learning is supported by stimulating classroom environments.
- Teaching that is less effective, especially in Key Stage 3, tends to feature learning objectives that lack specificity.
- The department is currently seeking to develop its assessment practice, making use of a pupil record book that will build in self assessment and target setting. At present, practice in the department at Key Stage 3 is inconsistent and, as a result, pupils have too little understanding about how to improve their work. Marking is variable in quality and too many pupils are given too little feedback about strengths and weaknesses in their writing.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- Most pupils are stimulated by the GCSE curriculum in English and make good progress. Results at Key Stage 3 show that the curriculum is less effective, fails to motivate pupils sufficiently and does not challenge the more able.
- The department is currently revising its curriculum at Key Stage 3. This aims to provide a broader and more systematic programme with a better balance of literary with non-literary and media elements. The first materials produced, for Year 7, are of good quality.
- A strength of the curriculum has been the policy of entering all pupils for GCSE English Literature, leading to good results. The department is now seeking to provide a wider range of pathways through GCSE with

a more differentiated curriculum including media studies for some less able pupils. Drama is also taken by a small number of pupils at GCSE.

- The department offers some enrichment activities including a targeted programme of theatre visits.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management in English are good.

- The department acknowledges that standards should be higher at Key Stage 3. There is a good capacity to improve and the new head of department has a good understanding of strengths and weaknesses in English and how to improve provision.
- The department has recently undergone a thorough internal review; this involved the head of department working closely with a deputy headteacher. The review drew on a wide range of evidence, including the view of pupils. This has led to good quality self-evaluation and has helped to set a clear direction for department improvement.
- The department makes use of a wide range of strategies for monitoring and evaluating effectiveness. It is increasingly using evidence from pupils. The progress of pupils is well mapped in GCE. However, there is no systematic approach to tracking pupils' progress at Key Stage 3; as a result, under-achievement is not identified early enough and some pupils remain unchallenged.

Provision for poetry

Provision for poetry is good.

- Pupils, including the most able, mostly respond well to poetry in the GCSE course, especially where the teaching is varied and stimulating.
- Pupils are less positive about poetry at Key Stage 3. Poetry has not been a significant element in the scheme of work and evidence suggests that the approach has been too often reliant on formal analysis.
- The new scheme of work at Key Stage 3 introduces poetry in its historical and social context. This is an innovative approach that is likely to prepare pupils well for GCSE. The head of department is also keen that teachers share poems with pupils regularly throughout the year.
- The department encourages pupils to take part in poetry competitions. Some pupils have written their own collections of poetry at Key Stage 4 and these have been entered for the exam as coursework.

Inclusion

Inclusion in English is satisfactory.

- Achievement in English is good overall although pupils make less progress in Key Stage 3.
- Performance data suggest that able pupils are capable of achieving more and GCSE results in English last year showed an above average gap between the performance of girls and boys.
- The school uses intervention resources to provide additional support for literacy including reading.
- At present, the department does not track pupils' progress systematically in Key Stage 3 and this limits its capacity to provide additional targeted support.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving teaching at Key Stage 3 in order to raise standards,
- tracking pupils' progress more effectively at Key Stage 3 in order to challenge under-achievement, and
- developing the quality of feedback to pupils about their work through better marking and target setting.

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

Philip Jarrett
Subject Adviser for English