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Ms L Lee
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Lee

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 13-14 June 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 eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Standards in English are above average and the pupils make good progress in their learning.

- Standards and achievement have risen significantly in English in recent years across the school and this is a continuing trend.
- Pupils enter the school with standards that are above average. They make very good progress in their learning at Key Stage 3 and attain standards that are well above average.
- Standards at Key Stage 4 in GCSE English and English Literature have risen steadily since 2001 and there was a further significant rise in 2006. Over this period, the pupils' progress has improved steadily and

is now good. However, a small number of pupils do not make such good progress in Years 10 and 11 as they do at Key Stage 3.

- English Literature and English Language are increasingly popular subjects at Advanced Level. The pupils reach above average standards and make outstanding progress in their learning.
- English makes a very good contribution to the personal development and well-being of the pupils. They speak enthusiastically about the subject, the way in which it is taught and how it helps them to develop important skills for their future.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- In the best teaching, good questioning techniques challenge the pupils to extend and explain their answers in a way which motivates them and increases their understanding.
- Teachers are accomplished listeners, which ensures that pupils feel valued and included in lessons. This creates an atmosphere in which pupils reflect on their learning productively.
- Learning objectives are clearly linked to previous and future learning, with skills highlighted that will be used in the next lessons.
- There is a good blend of individual, paired, group and whole class work which is well matched to the pupils' ability.
- Occasionally, teachers spend a little too long explaining tasks when pupils are ready to get on with their work, which leads to some chattiness and loss of concentration.
- Although the department has created opportunities for using information and communication technology (ICT) in response to the last inspection report, the use made of it in classrooms is variable.
- Setting arrangements are flexible and linked to outstanding assessment arrangements.
- Marking is regular, very effective and consistent across the department. It emphasises what has been achieved and points out the next steps for learning clearly. Pupils speak highly of this aspect of the subject and have a good knowledge of how to improve their work.
- Pupils fully understand the target setting process and respond well to the clarity of the teachers' monitoring of their progress.
- The department recognises that the already excellent quality of assessment would be further improved by introducing some common assessments in Key Stage 3.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding.

- The curriculum is broad, balanced and meets the needs of learners well. Its outstanding quality has been a key factor in improving the overall effectiveness of the department
- At Key Stage 3 there is an excellent bank of schemes of work which are followed simultaneously by all classes. This allows teachers to discuss different ways of delivering the curriculum, enhancing its effectiveness and the extensive opportunities for creativity.
- The National Curriculum is well covered, in a way that ensures that important skills are included with clear progression routes.
- There is ample opportunity to develop skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening.
- Enrichment activities are good and are particularly well developed for Key Stage 3 and the sixth form.
- Pupils find the curriculum interesting and motivating.

Leadership and management of English

The quality of leadership and management is outstanding.

- The head of department has a clear vision for the department which is focused on raising achievement. As a consequence of her outstanding leadership, achievement has improved so that it is now good in relation to national trends.
- The head of department leads by example and her expectations are clear. An important aspect of her leadership has been to create a committed team who have a collective sense of purpose, responsibility and pride in their work.
- Excellent management ensures that resources are readily available and procedures for monitoring and evaluation are smooth and effective. The department's evaluation of its work is detailed, thorough and accurate, giving a clear picture of strengths and areas for development. Strategic planning is good and ensures that improvements have a firm basis.
- The head of department has introduced excellent assessment arrangements, ensuring that teachers have a thorough knowledge of the progress made by the pupils.
- The department is well regarded by pupils and staff, making a significant contribution to results and providing examples of good practice for other subjects.

Provision for poetry

The provision for poetry is outstanding.

- Pupils throughout the school enjoy poetry and discuss individual poems well. The department enables them to think, talk and write critically about poetry very well. However, the pupils do not have much knowledge of individual poets.

- Pupils in Key Stage 3 are given an excellent introduction to poetry and plenty of opportunities to write it in different forms. They do so with enthusiasm and effectiveness.
- Poetry writing is not the preserve of the more able, with all pupils making good progress in this respect.
- The teaching of poetry is enhanced by visiting poets and by entry to writing and performing competitions, regularly won by young poets in the school.
- Opportunities to write poetry decrease as the pupils get older, largely because of the requirements of examination syllabuses. However, there are some good examples of coursework written in poetic form at Key Stage 4.

Inclusion

Inclusion is good.

- The full entitlement of the National Curriculum is followed by pupils throughout Years 7 to 11.
- All pupils have access to GCSE courses at Key Stage 4 and a high proportion are entered for GCSE English Literature.
- Pupils' work is assessed regularly and the progress of individuals and groups is carefully tracked to ensure that they are making expected progress. Effective intervention is put in place when necessary.
- The ethos of the department ensures that all pupils feel valued in lessons and that they have confidence and pride in their achievements at all levels.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that pupils and teachers use ICT more effectively in the subject
- developing common assessments for the year groups in Key Stage 3.

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

Andrew Harrett
Her Majesty's Inspector