

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040  
F 020 7421 6855  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



27 September 2007

Ms M Platts MBE  
Headteacher  
Belle Vue Girls' School  
Thorn Lane, Bingley Road  
Bradford, West Yorkshire  
BD9 6NA

Dear Ms Platts

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 19-20 September 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: independent learning in English. 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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of six lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be good and improving.

Achievement and standards

Standards are below average but improving. Students' achievement is good overall.

- Attainment on entry to the school is below average. Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 have also been below average over recent years. However, results have improved each year since 2004 and appear to be close to the national average in 2007.
- Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 have shown more variation. However, the unvalidated 2007 results were much better than the previous year. English Literature results have improved significantly over recent years and the 2007 results were especially good.
- Students' achievement has been outstanding at Key Stage 3, with the school placed in the top 10% of schools nationally. Progress has not

been as strong at Key Stage 4 although the achievement of students in 2007 was very good. Overall, students make at least good progress from ages 11 to 16.

- Results at Advanced level have been good with nearly all students passing the examinations in recent years. However, fewer students achieve the higher grades. The school's own data suggest that achievement is broadly satisfactory.
- Students' attitudes towards English are positive overall and behaviour in lessons was consistently good. Students respond particularly well when lessons are inter-active.

### Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- The lessons observed varied in quality. Overall, they were good and there was evidence of some outstanding practice.
- All lessons featured good relationships and effective use of specialist knowledge. Speaking and listening activities were well integrated. The most effective teaching showed the impact of well chosen learning objectives and activities that challenged the most able students. There were also several especially good, practical examples of teaching that matched the learning needs of different groups of students.
- Lessons that were not as effective tended to start slowly and did not meet the learning needs of certain groups of students, including the most able.
- The department is beginning to make effective use of assessment practices including peer assessment and reviews of progress against clear criteria. Progress is being monitored more systematically through regular half-termly departmental assessments.
- Discussion with students revealed that some are unsure about ways of improving their work. Feedback from marking and the use of curricular targets are not yet effective enough in all classes.

### Quality of curriculum

The curriculum in English is good.

- There are particular strengths to the curriculum in English at Key Stage 3. It is broad, well planned and progressive. The Year 9 programme retains this breadth while preparing students well for the national tests.
- The department uses a stimulating range of good contemporary fiction.
- There is a good focus on continuing to develop students' wider reading, supported by close links with the school library.
- The school offers a good choice of courses at GCSE, including drama and media studies. The department has a flexible approach to entering students for courses and works hard to meet individual needs.

## Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management are good in English.

- The department's leaders have brought about continuing improvements in standards and achievement over recent years and the subject is popular with most students.
- The department's leadership team works well together and individual strengths appear to be well matched. There is a very good capacity for further improvement.
- The departmental leadership has put in place effective schemes of work, supported by detailed resources. The head of department has an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses in the subject and has identified some clear areas for improvement.
- Good management is seen in the improved use of monitoring, including analysis of data for all classes and feedback to colleagues from work scrutiny. There is evidence of effective collaboration with local authority consultants.

## Independent learning in English

Independent learning in English is satisfactory.

- The school has identified independent learning as a current whole school priority. It has defined independent learning helpfully for staff, provided training, involved students in discussions, and planned research activities to monitor progress.
- Good examples of independent learning in English include: the emphasis on promoting independent reading at Key Stage 3; drama and English activities, including collaborative work; some pupil choice such as pre-reading in the sixth form to help students agree on the best poet to study; and individual research tasks, especially at Key Stage 3.
- Lessons observed sometimes limited opportunities for independent work and students expressed the view that some lessons at Key Stage 4 are over-dominated by teacher talk.
- ICT does not yet play a substantial role in English lessons and students have limited opportunities to exercise choice, for instance in the topic or form for writing.

## Inclusion

Inclusion in English is good.

- The curriculum enables all students to make at least good progress. Performance data suggests that some groups of students including students eligible for free school meals and some pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) do especially well. Intervention

programmes have been effective in raising the performance of identified students.

- The curriculum at Key Stage 4 is well planned, flexible and effective in providing for the learning needs of different groups of students.
- Challenging targets are set for pupils' achievement and these were largely met in 2007. The end-of-course targets now need to be broken down for students into easy-to-understand smaller steps in learning.
- Support for students with LDD was effective in lessons observed although some opportunities were missed for more strategic collaboration between teachers and teaching assistants.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving students' understanding of their strengths and weaknesses through more consistent feedback and short term targets
- using existing good practice to improve planning for the needs of different groups of learners in lessons, including the most able.

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

Philip Jarrett HMI  
Subject Adviser for English