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Mr D Pearmain  
Headteacher/Principal  
Kenton School and Technology College  
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Dear Mr Pearmain

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 24 and 25 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 pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of eight lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be satisfactory and improving.

Achievement and standards

Standards are average and achievement is satisfactory.

- Standards on entry and at the end of Key Stage 3 are well below average. They are close to average by the end of Key Stage 4 and better in the sixth form. At 16, most students take two English qualifications. Outcomes are below average in English language, but good in English literature and media studies. Trends show some improvement, but boys do less well than girls.
- Inspection evidence confirmed the below average standards in Key Stage 3 and overall satisfactory progress. Students' reading is better than their writing. Speaking and listening skills develop adequately from an often low starting point.

- English has a good impact on students' personal development, reflected in their positive attitudes and the take up of sixth form courses and revision classes.

## Quality of teaching and learning of English

Teaching and learning are satisfactory.

- Lessons observed were good overall, broadly confirming the school's own view of its increasingly consistent quality.
- Lessons meet the very wide range of skills and stimulate interest and thought. They offer good pace and choice so students respond well.
- In general, the teachers ask questions skilfully to assess understanding and help students develop their ideas. The students, including those with low literacy skills, know what they need to do better and are well supported with sensitive guidance.
- In the satisfactory lessons seen, which were in Key Stage 3, students' progress was limited because teachers' plans were less clear about how learning would happen and the review of learning did not involve students well enough. Teachers were less successful in guiding exploratory talk.
- Assessment is good for older students and helps them reach appropriate targets. It is satisfactory in Key Stage 3, where precision in assessing and giving feedback is less well developed.

## Quality of curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- The curriculum meets the full range of interests and aptitudes very well. It is kept under review and offers all a rich breadth including media and drama. In addition to GCSE English, which some take early, a high proportion of students takes English literature and GCSE or BTec in media studies, with drama and entry level English as further options. For 16 year olds there is a wide and popular choice of courses.
- The students' literacy deficit is being tackled in innovative ways which are helping to drive up achievement. These include an engaging transition programme and a media project which strongly motivates students in Year 9.
- Good use is made of technology in lessons to present concepts vividly and make learning interactive, and the school's website contains some good resources for teachers and learners.

## Leadership and management of English

The leadership and management of English are good.

- The head of English provides an outstanding model of teaching, makes clear what needs to be done and shares responsibilities well.
- Self evaluation is well grounded on analysis of data and leads to innovative strategies. The improvement plan details how improvements will be achieved and is rigorously monitored. Good use is made of students' evaluations.
- The cohesive teaching team contributes well to resources. Consistency has been improved by clear guidance and constructive feedback. There are sensible plans for paired research.
- Links with the local authority's consultant, subject networks and other areas of the school are used productively.
- Though challenging targets have not been met, standards and achievement have improved.

## Independent learning in English

The provision for independent learning is good.

- Students regularly choose their own books and read in school.
- They often choose the topic or form of their writing, and their GCSE coursework illustrates the individuality of some of their writing.
- The readiness of students to ask thoughtful questions in lessons is a strength of the subject. They regularly make presentations. Homework challenges students to work independently: Year 11 students who had researched the Vietnam war contributed distinctively to the impressive discussion of a poem in the following lesson.
- Students note what they have learned or can use again in learning journals, but teachers need to help them reflect on this.
- The use of ICT increasingly supports independent learning. The good resources for study on the website are well used by students. The lively site helps students understand what's going on in this big school and they use it to voice their ideas.

## Inclusion

Inclusion is satisfactory.

- Students with learning difficulties or disabilities and those with English as an additional language make satisfactory progress in line with their peers and feel well supported by their teachers and helpers.
- Foundation groups led by specialists meet the needs of those who start with very low levels of literacy. All students experience the breadth of English and there are pathways to qualifications for all.

- Targeted interventions and support are provided in class for those who need them. Progress is monitored and sets are regularly reviewed, though comprehensive tracking is at an early stage across the school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising achievement, especially of boys, in Key Stage 3 and in English GCSE
- improving teachers' management of speaking and listening activities and the reviewing of learning.

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

Susan Bowles  
Her Majesty's Inspector