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Mr Allan Jones
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Jones

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 25 and 26 September 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 independent learning. 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 six lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good. Standards are above average.

- Attainment on entry to the school in Year 8 is broadly average.
- All groups, including pupils with special educational needs, those with English as an additional language and able pupils, achieve well.
- Pupils make very good progress at Key Stage 3. Standards have been consistently well above average, although falling to broadly average in 2007. At Key Stage 4, progress slows somewhat, although remaining good. Standards are above average in Language and broadly average in Literature.
- Girls consistently perform better than boys at both key stages, although broadly in line with the national gap, apart from Level 6 and

above at Key Stage 3. Here, the gap in attainment has been consistently above the national figure.

- Standards of speaking and listening are good.
- English makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development, particularly through opportunities for independent and collaborative learning, and from the expression of personal opinions in lessons.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Expectations for achievement are high and a good range of teaching and learning strategies promote collaborative and independent learning well.
- Lessons are planned well. They are interesting, appropriately challenging, well resourced, briskly paced and meet the needs of learners well.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge, skills are thoroughly taught and good use of questioning probes and extends learning.
- Assessment for learning is very good. There is clear impact of careful assessment, tracking and monitoring contributing to pupils' progress.
- Learning objectives are clear and well executed and marking is thorough, supportive and sets clear targets for improvement. Strategies for self and peer assessment are common.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is carefully planned for breadth, balance and progression and reviewed regularly. Drama and media are used well to engage pupils and to extend learning.
- Teaching is supported well by carefully selected and good quality resources.
- Successful interventions include considerable support for individual pupils, leading to good gains in learning and improved attainment.
- The department has identified broadening provision for enrichment activities as an area for development.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management are good.

- Clear policies and procedures alongside systematic monitoring ensure consistently good quality provision and contribute to above average standards.
- Analysis of performance data informs planning for improvement.

- There is a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in English, clear priorities and a sound grasp of how to improve.

Provision for independent learning

Provision for independent learning is good.

- Pupils enjoy English and make good progress.
- Oral work is a strong feature of provision. Pupils are confident in their own skills and talk openly and well. They enjoy discussion and drama as opportunities to use their initiative and explore personal meaning.
- There are good opportunities for independent learning in reading and homework tasks in particular. Pupils are given regular opportunities to read texts of their own choice in school and to talk about them.
- Teachers provide good support in writing for those pupils who need it. Other pupils are increasingly able to write independently across a range of genres and make good progress as a result.

Inclusion

Inclusion is outstanding.

- The department is highly responsive to the needs of pupils.
- Curricular provision and additional support for individuals through interventions, and from teachers and support staff, have a very positive impact on motivation, behaviour, progress and attainment.
- The curriculum meets the needs of learners well. Expectations for all to achieve well are high: effective lesson planning ensures work is well matched to need; a good range of teaching and learning strategies results in active participation; marking and targets set contribute to gains in learning; and the progress of all pupils is carefully tracked and any intervention is prompt.
- Good resources from a range of cultures offer a broad experience of literature.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- reducing the gender gap in attainment at Key Stages 3 and 4, in particular for Level 6 and above at Key Stage 3; and
- broadening provision for enrichment activities.

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 and 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

Rosemary Matthews
Her Majesty's Inspector