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Ms E Draisey  
Headteacher  
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Dear Ms Draisey

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 15 - 16 October 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 six lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Standards in English are above average across the school and the pupils make good progress.

- Standards in English at Key Stage 3 are consistently above average over time and the pupils make good progress in their learning overall.
- Standards are also consistently high in GCSE examinations in English and in English literature and the pupils make good progress overall.
- Pupils in the sixth form attain above average standards in English courses at Advanced Level and progress is good overall.
- Standards in speaking and listening are above average across the school.

- English makes a good contribution to the personal development of the pupils. They behave well and enjoy English lessons. They are enthusiastic about the programme of trips and visits in English which enrich their experience well.

## Quality of teaching and learning of English

Teaching and learning are good.

- Clear learning objectives linked to appropriate tasks ensure that the purpose of lessons is clear to the pupils.
- Teachers use questioning techniques skilfully to probe and extend the pupils' understanding.
- The pace of the lessons is brisk and purposeful, providing suitable challenge and support to which the pupils respond well.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge which informs their planning well.
- Pupils set targets for their own improvement well, which teachers monitor effectively.
- Although group and paired oral work is used satisfactorily to extend learning, it is sometimes too loosely structured, which occasionally leads to a loss of focus and motivation.
- Marking is regular and points out what has been achieved clearly, but next steps for learning are not always specific.

## Quality of curriculum

The curriculum in English is good.

- The curriculum meets statutory requirements and enables all pupils to make progress in their learning.
- It is enriched by a range of trips and visits which gives pupils a good experience of theatre and opportunities for creative writing.
- Creativity is promoted well by the variety of opportunities to participate in writing events and competitions in and out of school.
- At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form the curriculum is appropriately linked to assessment.
- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 ensures good coverage of the National Curriculum, but the assessment arrangements associated with it do not help the department to monitor the pupils' progression in particular skills.

## Leadership and management of English

The quality of leadership and management is good.

- Good leadership and management have ensured that standards are high and achievement good.
- The new head of department, appointed in September 2007, has swiftly established an accurate view of the strengths and areas for development in English.
- Monitoring and evaluation are detailed and linked to good strategic planning. The head of department's plans to improve procedures are well conceived. The capacity for further improvement in standards and achievement is good.
- The head of department is well supported by the Key Stage leaders.
- There is a good team spirit in the department, which contains a high proportion of new members.

## Independent learning in English

Independent learning in English is good.

- Pupils are skilled in evaluating their own work in English and devising their own targets for improvement.
- Pupils read widely and independently and discuss their choices with clarity and enthusiasm.
- Homework tasks develop the pupils' research skills and encourage independent learning.
- Pupils raise their own questions in discussion and occasionally choose their own topics for writing and oral work. They are confident and articulate in discussion and the department effectively teaches them how to develop and express their own opinions.

## Inclusion

Inclusion in English is good.

- All groups of pupils make at least satisfactory progress in their learning and most make good progress.
- Pupils with specific learning difficulties are well catered for in lessons and make good progress in their learning.
- The department ensures that opportunities for enrichment and access to programmes of study and schemes of work are open to all pupils.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that the curriculum at Key Stage 3 contains clear assessment opportunities at fixed points, targeted at particular skills
- making sure that marking points out next steps for learning consistently
- making the purpose of group and paired oral work clearer to the pupils.

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

Andrew Harrett  
Her Majesty's Inspector