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05 November 2007

Ms R Allard
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Allard

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 31 October and 1 November 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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of seven lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Standards are well above average and students' achievement is outstanding.

- Attainment on entry to the school and in the sixth form is above average. The attainment of a number of students is very high.
- Students make significantly above average progress and standards in all aspects of English are well above average at the end of key stages 3 and 4, and at post-16.
- Students are highly articulate, confident and persuasive speakers, and respectful, reflective and critical listeners. They are considered and analytical readers, read for pleasure, and convey complex ideas and insights very well orally and in interesting and imaginative writing.
- Provision for personal development is outstanding. Students participate actively in extra-curricular and enrichment activities. They have extensive

opportunities for group, pair and independent work and to show initiative. The expression of personal views in lessons is encouraged strongly and consistently; contributions are assured and well considered.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding.

- Teaching meets the differing needs of students very well. Expectations are very high and lessons are planned very well, although support staff are not always fully utilised. Lessons are interesting, varied, provide a very good balance of learning in reading, writing, speaking and listening, and plan for the careful and systematic teaching of skills.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and teach with passion and enthusiasm. Students are highly motivated, work hard and enjoy their lessons.
- Assessment for learning is fully integrated into teachers' planning and effective in raising achievement. Marking is careful and accurate and oral and written feedback from teachers and other students is challenging and highly supportive. Clear targets for individuals ensure students know where they are and what they need to do to improve.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding.

- The English curriculum is very well planned for balance, breadth and progression. Skills are systematically taught, drama is integrated well and enrichment activities provide good intellectual challenge.
- Teachers use an excellent range of strategies and carefully chosen, high quality resources and technology, to stimulate and motivate students to achieve highly.
- The department makes a particularly significant contribution to students' social and cultural development through very well chosen texts and considerable opportunities to examine current and controversial issues.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management are outstanding.

- Highly effective leadership, a comprehensive and accurate view of strengths and weaknesses, and staff who are very hard working, expert practitioners, secure high standards.
- The department has a clear vision for English, a strong and shared sense of direction and is wholly focused on high achievement through excellent provision.

- Performance data are analysed rigorously, the progress of all students is tracked systematically and prompt action is taken to remedy under-achievement.

Provision for independent learning

Provision for independent learning is outstanding.

- Students are very clear about the considerable and positive impact of English on their learning and development. They are expected to take charge of their own learning and are supported very well to do so, including by other students. They enjoy English, gain significantly in confidence and apply what they have been taught very effectively because the department has built ways to promote independent learning into schemes of work very successfully.
- Oral work, presentations and the expression of personal viewpoints are particularly strong features of provision. Students are very confident in their skills and talk openly and well. They frequently raise their own questions in lessons, enjoy discussion and drama as opportunities to explore personal meaning, and relish challenge from others.
- The school promotes personal reading strongly. Students are given regular opportunities to read texts of their own choice in school and to talk about them. Carefully structured choice and very good support results in students being increasingly able to write independently and well across a range of genres.
- Homework is used well to develop learning and independence of study.

Inclusion

Inclusion is outstanding.

- All groups of students achieve very well in English and derive maximum benefit from what the department provides. Highly personable and respectful relationships between students and teachers and between students themselves, contribute significantly to the very positive ethos for learning.
- Students of all abilities engage in highly challenging, yet accessible tasks, enjoy their learning and make very good progress.
- Excellent use of group, pair and whole class work, effective interventions, particularly good open and targeted questioning that develops independent thinking, and a clear expectation that students should assume responsibility for their own learning, are significant in promoting self-reliance.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- continuing to raise standards further as identified by the school, and
- utilising support staff fully in all lessons.

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