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16 October 2007

Mrs F Manning  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Manning

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 2-3 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 ten lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be good.

#### Achievement and Standards

Achievement is good and standards in English are well above average.

- Attainment on entry is above average. By the end of Key Stage 3 attainment in 2006 was well above average. Test results rose further in 2007.
- Key Stage 3 test, GCSE, AS and A2 results have been consistently well above the national average.
- All students, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, achieve well in English.
- English provision adds value to the students' education as is shown by the high Contextual Value Added.

## Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning in English is good with some outstanding features.

- English teachers form a cohesive and self-critical group. As a result there is a constant drive to improve teaching.
- Teachers have benefited from sharing good practice under the school's science specialist status.
- Teaching seen was consistently good with some outstanding features. Students spoke very highly of their teachers.
- Amongst the strengths in teaching are the following: teachers always set clear intended learning outcomes; students are given many opportunities to work independently and are well supported in lessons, and, learning is good because of the variety of activities offered.
- Occasionally, teachers' questions are closed which limits opportunities for students to expand on their responses.
- Teachers have successfully inculcated a strong and abiding love of literature in their students as seen from the way that the students spoke about their reading.
- Assessment is such that students are always told what they need to do next to improve further. They are also given good support in working towards the targets that their teachers set for them.

## Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- Students like English because of the way that planning ensures a variety of interesting activities that engage students of differing abilities. Planning has a strong focus on encouraging reading and creative writing, both spoken of well by students.
- The English department has introduced GCSE media studies at GCSE (September 2005) and AS (September 2007) in order to widen the choice given to students in Years 10 and 11.
- All aspects of English are covered so that students have equal opportunities to improve their speaking, listening, reading and writing. This is further supplemented by extra curricular activities such as book clubs, theatre visits and taking part in drama productions.
- The curriculum offers some opportunities to celebrate other cultures through reading and discussion.

## Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management in English are outstanding.

- Test and examination results have continued to improve because of the strong focus on improving standards introduced by the subject leader. This has been done through strong collaborative work within a cohesive department that shares its drive for improvements. The result has been comprehensive and detailed planning with agreed areas for improvement.
- Senior leaders work closely with the English department and monitor its work with clear areas for improvement identified and revisited subsequently. The link governor knows the department's work well and has very good relationships with staff.
- Amongst the many improvements in the department since the last inspection have been the strong focuses on the students' learning and on enhancing their love of literature. The result has been students who readily engage in creative writing and whose work is taken very seriously by their peers and their teachers.

## Independent learning in English

Provision for independent learning is good with outstanding features.

- Students have regular opportunities to work independently. This is one of many areas of experience that students speak highly of.
- Opportunities to work independently have had a positive impact on the students' learning. It has also helped create avid readers who clearly love literature. This is further shown through the students' many examples of creative writing.

## Inclusion

Inclusion in English is good.

- All students feel fully included in the life of the English department. Students speak very highly of their teachers and of their experiences of English.
- Teachers always vary the activities offered in their lessons. As a result students of differing abilities have opportunities to experience their preferred learning style. This is further enhanced by teachers differentiating tasks set to help students make the best of their capability. Consequently, no particular group underachieves in English.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that teachers' questions are sufficiently open ended to allow students to reflect, as well as expand further, on their responses.

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

Faysal Mikdadi  
Additional Inspector