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Mr P Smith  
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Dear Mr Smith

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 13-14 November 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 satisfactory.

Achievement and Standards

Achievement is satisfactory and standards in English are average.

- Key Stage 3 results improved in 2007 becoming slightly above average. GCSE English language results also improved and are now average. English literature results were below the national average. AS and A2 results were average.
- Standards are improving especially in Key Stage 3 because of developments in provision in areas such as assessment for learning, use of data for setting targets and classroom teacher support.
- All students, including those with learning difficulties as well as those with English as an additional language, achieve the same as their peers.

## Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning in English is satisfactory.

- English teachers form a cohesive group who work together to improve provision and raise standards.
- Teaching seen was never less than satisfactory with good features especially in assessment for learning, supporting students' individual needs and offering a variety of activities.
- There is a tendency amongst teachers to exert too much control during lessons. The result is that students do not receive sufficient opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning or to work independently.
- The English department has successfully inculcated a wide culture of reading for pleasure, which the students spoke well of.
- Assessment strategies help students understand what they need to do to improve their work. The recent focus on test and examination marking criteria has produced improved results especially in Key Stage 3.

## Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- Students say that they like English because of the opportunities to read and to take part in activities. Planning has had a strong focus on test and examination criteria, which have helped raise standards. There are still relatively few opportunities for students to work independently.
- The changes in GCSE and sixth form syllabuses have produced improved standards of performance.
- Enrichment opportunities are highly valued by students who appear to enjoy the theatre trips and the visit to Flanders Fields.

## Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management in English are good.

- Test and examination results have improved because of the department's strong focus on assessment for learning and on learning strategies.
- Senior leaders work closely with the department. They are fully supportive of its current drive for raising standards. Monitoring and evaluation have been rigorous and have begun to have a positive impact on practice.
- Amongst the improvements in the department since the last inspection just over a year ago have been strategies for assessment, better use of data to set targets and to plan lessons and a wide acceptance of what constitutes good learning. The department recognises the need to ensure more independent learning in and out of the classroom.

## Independent learning in English

Provision for independent learning is satisfactory.

- There are occasions when students are given some opportunities to be independent, for example in choosing their reading. However, these opportunities are still limited by the relatively excessive teacher control in classrooms.
- Students said that opportunities for some independent work have recently improved although they also said that they are not used to being independent and that they felt more comfortable at this stage with teacher control.

## Inclusion

Inclusion in English is good.

- All groups within the department are fully included in its work. Consequently all students achieve equally without anyone being left behind.
- The increasing variety of activities in the classroom and the good support for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have ensured that individual needs are addressed well. The Key Stage 3 test results in 2007 included a high number of students with learning difficulties who did very well.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that teachers give students more opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning and to work independently, and
- improving GCSE English literature results.

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