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Mrs Hassell
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Hassell

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 23 and 24 January 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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of seven lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Standards in English are below average. Achievement is satisfactory.

- Data and the school's self assessment indicate that students enter with standards in English that are broadly in line with average.
- At Key Stage 3 standards have fallen and were below average in 2007 because significantly fewer students made the expected rates of progress.
- At the end of Key Stage 4 standards are below average but improving, particularly in English literature. In 2007 just over half of students who took a GCSE in English attained a C grade or above. The school has identified that over a quarter of students in the last four years have attained a D grade. It is giving a particularly focus to improving the attainments of these students.

- Students made significantly less than expected progress in Key Stage 4 in 2006 but there was an improvement in 2007.
- Progress seen in lessons was at least satisfactory and supports the lesson observation findings of the school's recent department review.
- The percentage of girls attaining A*-C grades at GCSE in 2007 was close to the national average and significantly better than boys. The school has given a priority to raising the attainment of boys.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning in English is satisfactory.

- Relationships are good so students behave well. They particularly enjoy the regular opportunities they are given to discuss and share their ideas in groups or with partners.
- Lessons are suitably structured, appropriate links are made with prior learning and the objectives are consistently shared so students know what is expected of them.
- The best lessons provide good pace and challenge for students so they achieve well but this is inconsistent. When activities lack variety and are not appropriately differentiated students become passive and compliant rather than excited by their learning.
- Students have targets for improvement which are reviewed regularly. However, some students in Key Stage 3 are unclear about the level they are on and what they should be aiming to achieve.
- Students have appropriate opportunities for peer and self assessment and their work is marked regularly. The best identifies precisely what they need to do to improve but this is not consistent across the department.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- The curriculum has been modified effectively for Year 7 students attaining below the nationally expected level and for students taking part time vocational routes in Key Stage 4.
- Schemes of work are being revised to provide clearer progression and a greater balance in skills development and content. The department has identified the need to provide a curriculum which engages boys more successfully

- Links with information and communication technology (ICT) are identified in planning and staff are receiving training in the use of interactive whiteboards. Students say they would like more opportunities to use ICT in lessons.
- Students identify some enrichment opportunities to enliven English and increase their enjoyment but these are limited, particularly at Key Stage 4.
- The library provides an appropriate range of resources to support the development of literacy skills and reading materials are clearly organised into different levels but its use to enrich the English curriculum is underdeveloped.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management in English are satisfactory.

- The recent department review provides an honest and accurate evaluation of strengths and weaknesses.
- The English department has experienced a period of change but there is now greater stability, strengthened leadership and a shared commitment to improvement.
- Data is gathered regularly and pupil progress recorded by the department but is not yet used systematically or robustly enough to identify underachievement quickly and provide sufficient challenge for all students to ensure they make good progress.
- Leadership is well supported through staff development and training, is involved appropriately in monitoring and has regular opportunities to share good practice.

Independent learning in English

Provision for independent learning in English is satisfactory.

- Helpful revision packs are focused on supporting independence in writing in Key Stage 4.
- Independence in reading is appropriately encouraged through readathons and competitions but engaging students in reading for pleasure is a challenge for the school.
- Regular homework is set and there are some opportunities for students to carry out their own research and prepare presentations but developing independence in English is not yet embedded in the schemes of work.

Inclusion

Inclusion in English is satisfactory.

- Provision for English meets the needs of most learners although students, particularly boys, are not always sufficiently challenged or actively engaged so do not make the progress expected.
- The Reading Matters intervention, linked with the Youth Offending Team, has been introduced and targeted at reluctant readers but it is too early to evaluate its impact.
- The intensive literacy teaching for lower attaining students in Year 7 is well established and meets their needs well.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- using assessment information more rigorously to identify underachievement and focus lesson planning
- ensuring lessons are consistently good by providing varied tasks which motivate, challenge and actively engage students
- enlivening the curriculum through carefully planned enrichment activities, including the extended use of ICT and the library and
- ensuring all students know precisely how well they are doing and how to improve.

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

Jackie Krafft
Her Majesty's Inspector