

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040  
F 020 7421 6855  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



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Mr E Dawson  
Headteacher  
Sir William Romney's School  
Lowfield Road  
Tetbury  
Gloucestershire  
GL8 8AE

Dear Mr Dawson

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 23-24 January 2008 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 satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Standards in English are average and the achievement of the pupils is satisfactory.

- Pupils enter the school with standards in English which are average. Standards improved considerably last year and were average in the national tests in 2007 at Key Stage 3 and in GCSE English. Similar average standards were observed in the school during the inspection.
- The progress made by the pupils has improved and their achievement is now satisfactory. However, some more able pupils do not achieve the higher levels of which they are capable in reading and writing at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.
- Standards in speaking and listening are above average throughout the school.

- English makes a good contribution to the personal development and well-being of the pupils. Recent changes to the style of teaching and learning help the pupils to reflect on their work effectively and to collaborate well with others, so developing important skills for life.
- The pupils speak appreciatively of the opportunities for theatre trips and the impact of visitors to the school, such as a theatrical company which has helped with their understanding of Shakespeare.

### Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Stable staffing and clear leadership after a time of some turbulence have had a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning.
- The subject knowledge of the teachers is good and they establish a good rapport with the pupils.
- A good variety of tasks in lessons engages and motivates the pupils.
- Good questioning techniques probe and extend the pupils' understanding and encourage them to seek clarification and to share their opinions with others.
- Teachers and teaching assistants provide individual pupils with good support in their learning.
- Time for reflection and sharing ideas in lessons enables the pupils to assess their progress and consolidate their learning well.
- Assessment is regular and tells pupils what they have achieved clearly. Although there is some good practice in pointing out how pupils might improve their work, this is not consistently applied across the department.
- Occasionally, some tasks go on for too long, leading to rushed conclusions to lessons. It also sometimes leads to a slackening of the pace and challenge of the lessons, so that the more able are not consistently challenged and stretched.

### Quality of curriculum

The curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- The curriculum in English meets statutory requirements, enabling the pupils to make satisfactory progress. It provides sufficient opportunities for the pupils to develop their skills in English.
- There is some enrichment of the curriculum through trips and visits, which the pupils appreciate.
- Changes to the delivery and structure of the curriculum have improved the enjoyment of the pupils in Key Stage 3; they speak enthusiastically about the range of opportunities in the subject. For example, more active approaches to Shakespeare provide good opportunities for creativity in written and oral work.

- Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are less enthusiastic about the English curriculum, but appreciate that it provides a sound basis for their achievement in the subject. The relatively new head of department and the English team are aware that the curriculum at Key Stage 4 requires changes in line with those that have already been made to good effect in the lower school.
- Drama, information and communications technology and media tools such as video editing facilities are increasingly enriching the pupils' experience of English.
- The curriculum presently ensures coverage of the National Curriculum. Consideration of how progress will be made through the activities and measured by their assessment is satisfactory but not yet sufficiently developed to ensure good achievement. Recent plans for the Year 7 curriculum show that the school is beginning to address these areas.

### Leadership and management of English

The quality of the leadership and management of English is good.

- The department has made significant progress in the last year in raising achievement across the school. Improvements have been made at an unusually fast rate, so raising achievement in English from a low base to satisfactory levels in a relatively short time.
- Positive changes in attitudes towards English at Key Stage 3, arising from the enjoyment and appreciation of new approaches to teaching and learning, also show the good impact of leadership and management.
- The head of department has a clear and ambitious vision for improving English in the school. Self evaluation has accurately identified the strengths and areas for development in the subject. Strategic planning has established the right priorities for action.
- The department is stable, coherent and collaborative, sharing work and resources well.
- The head of department works well with other local secondary schools to share good practice.
- The capacity for further improvement in English is good.

### Independent learning in English

The quality of independent learning is satisfactory.

- Oral work is a strong feature of English lessons, encouraging pupils to think for themselves, express their views clearly and consider the opinions of others.
- At Key Stage 3, pupils speak enthusiastically about their reading and their own choices of books.

- Recent changes to the style of teaching and learning encourage the pupils to work well together and to find their own solutions to problems.

## Inclusion

Inclusion in English is satisfactory.

- Pupils make satisfactory progress in their learning.
- Teachers and teaching assistants ensure that pupils with particular learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress.
- Some more able pupils are capable of achieving higher levels than they do.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that lessons have sufficient pace and challenge for all pupils, particularly the more able
- revising the curriculum with an emphasis on progression in the acquisition of skills, and
- developing assessment procedures that measure progress accurately and highlight areas for improvement precisely.

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