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Mr Sherington
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Sherington

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 06 and 07 February 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 five lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Standards in English are above average. Achievement is satisfactory.

- Data and the school's self assessment indicate that pupils enter the school with standards in English that are above average.
- Pupils make satisfactory progress in English during their time at the school to maintain standards which are above average.
- All students who take a GCSE in English attain a qualification although fewer than nationally attained the highest grade in English literature in 2007 and more girls than boys attain A* - C grades.
- Pupils make good progress through Key Stage 3 and in 2007 exceeded challenging targets but the rate of progress slows at Key Stage 4.
- Lessons observed and the school's own monitoring information indicates that pupils make good progress in lessons because they

respond well to the good teaching they receive but the impact of the curriculum on pupils is less positive at Key Stage 4.

- Some changes have been made to the curriculum to address this but these have not yet had an impact on achievement.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning in English is good.

- Lessons are planned carefully, well structured and build effectively on prior learning so the pace and challenge provided is well matched to pupils' needs. As a result they know what is expected of them, work productively and make good progress.
- Particular attention is given to providing pupils with increasing opportunities to discuss and share their ideas. This, supported by good relationships, makes a significant contribution to their enjoyment of English lessons.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge is used effectively to provide challenging questions and scaffold learning to engage pupils who behave well.
- There are regular assessments and pupils value the oral feedback and helpful developmental marking which helps them understand the levels they are working at and the targets they should be aiming to achieve.
- Interactive whiteboards have been recently acquired and are used in most lessons but their enrichment of learning varies and is less successful when used as a whiteboard.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- Schemes of work for Key Stage 3 are well organised, balanced and carefully planned to meet the needs of pupils and build their skills and knowledge effectively. In response to effective data analysis, they have been modified to include more texts to interest boys.
- The schemes of work for Key Stage 4 are less detailed and limited to the exam syllabus, particularly in literature. This inhibits the enjoyment of pupils and slows their progress.
- All pupils take a literature and language GCSE. A modular approach has been chosen but the school has identified that the curriculum at Key Stage 4 does not meet pupils' needs effectively enough. It is looking to develop a differentiated pathway to better motivate pupils and improve their achievement.
- AS level English literature is offered to some more able pupils in Year 9 and 10 who study this after school. The impact of this has been positive with pupils attaining good AS grades and saying that it helps them improve their GCSE grade.

- An ASDAN course is provided for less academic pupils to develop their literacy skills.
- Reading is promoted at Key Stage 3 but pupils feel they do not get opportunities for reading, other than set texts, at Key Stage 4.
- There is an appropriate range of enrichment activities but pupils would like more to enliven the curriculum. The new learning resource centre is underdeveloped and pupils feel it is not a welcoming place.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management of English are good.

- Self evaluation is based on detailed, systematic pupil tracking and regular analysis of performance. It accurately identifies the strengths and weaknesses in English and is used to provide additional support for students who need it.
- The department plans for improvement are relevant and have clear, measurable success criteria linked to improving pupil outcomes.
- Leaders are aware of the weaknesses in Key Stage 4 and are taking appropriate action to address these, including adjusting coursework deadlines and modifying the organisation of after-school revision.
- Monitoring and evaluation activities are varied and involve leaders in lesson observations, work scrutiny and discussion with pupils.
- There is a named governor linked to English who has also been involved in lesson observations so has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the department.
- Good leadership and management are evident in the good achievement at Key Stage 3, the good support and guidance provided to all pupils and the consistency of teaching and assessment. This has been developed through regular and thorough department moderation, joint planning and sharing good practice.

Independent learning in English

Provision for independent learning in English is satisfactory.

- The promotion of independence in reading varies between the key stages and older pupils feel they have limited opportunities to make choices about set texts.
- Pupils are given appropriate opportunities for independent research, including through homework. They enjoy using information and communication technology (ICT) and drama in some lessons and value the time they are given to plan and discuss their ideas.
- The school has a focus on the development of independence though greater use of ICT, increased speaking and listening opportunities and the development of exam technique but independent learning is not fully embedded in schemes of work.

Inclusion

Inclusion in English is satisfactory.

- Provision for English meets the needs of most learners although pupils at Key Stage 4, particularly boys, are not engaged or excited by the curriculum so do not make the progress expected, especially in literature.
- Targeted support through the 'Pit Stop' is having a positive impact on supporting pupils experiencing difficulties to achieve their target grades.
- Literacy and numeracy development (LAND) successfully supports lower attaining pupils in Key Stage 3 to develop their literacy skills.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing a more varied and appropriate curriculum at Key Stage 4 to raise achievement and motivate all pupils
- increasing opportunities for pupils to make choices and develop independence, including through the use of the Learning Resource Centre and enrichment activities.

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