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Mrs S Hill
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Dear Mrs Hill

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 12 - 13 March to look at work 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 with some good features.

Achievement and standards

Standards are average and achievement is satisfactory.

- Attainment on entry to the school is slightly below average. The percentage of students with special educational needs is high, as is the percentage of students with English as an additional language. All groups achieve equally and make satisfactory progress, although this is more marked at Key Stage 4.
- In 2007, results for Level 5+ and Level 6+ at Key Stage 3 were average. Results at Key Stage 4 for English Language and Literature were also average, although in each subject these fell significantly short of targets, as was the case in 2006.
- For Year 8 students who were accelerated, results for Level 5+ and Level 6+ were significantly above average and results at Level 7+ were

average. For students who were accelerated at Key Stage 4, AS results for A to C grades fell from 100% in 2006 to 70% in 2007.

- Standards of speaking and listening are good. Students are confident communicators and generally listen critically and well.
- Provision for personal development is good. Students have good opportunities for pair, group and independent learning and readily offer their personal opinions in lessons.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Some teaching observed was outstanding. Lessons were planned well and clear objectives, well chosen resources and a good range of teaching and learning strategies that included some very good use of technology, successfully engaged learners.
- Teachers had good subject knowledge and offered increasing challenge to students of all abilities from well structured and sequenced activities. Skills were taught well and good questioning, coupled with good support for individuals to manage tasks, probed and extended learning. Opportunities for self and peer assessment were good.
- Students enjoyed their lessons, collaborated very well, worked productively and made good progress, although lapses in concentration from a small minority were sometimes not addressed promptly.
- Marking is generally encouraging and supportive with good examples of written feedback challenging students to improve their work but there is some inconsistency.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Following a fundamental review of provision, breadth, balance, progression and regular assessment of learning are secured increasingly well through newly implemented schemes and units of work and the two-year accelerated Key Stage 3 curriculum.
- Students are prepared well for tests and examinations. Well chosen texts offer a broad experience of literature and good opportunities to examine cultural, topical and controversial issues.
- Enrichment activities are limited, with good plans for extension. Provision for homework is adequate. This is set regularly and provides a reasonable range of opportunities for independent learning but students identify limitations in challenge and purpose and regular completion is of concern to the department.
- Initiatives to promote reading in English and across the school demonstrate very strong commitment to addressing underperformance.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management are good.

- Following a period of considerable instability, good progress has been made in securing consistency and addressing weaknesses. Effective leadership that is highly focused on learning and achievement is strengthening teamwork and, with high quality external support that includes the local authority, securing sustained improvement. This can be seen in teaching that is currently good.
- The department has a thorough understanding of strengths and weaknesses, a clear sense of direction, well focused priorities and a good grasp of how to improve. However, success criteria in the area improvement plan do not specify outcomes from which to measure progress.
- Targeted action to raise standards is well underway. Clear procedures and systematic monitoring are contributing to improved provision; analysis of performance data and the tracking of students' progress are now informing targets and interventions, and good investment in professional development is securing increasingly accurate assessment.

Inclusion

Inclusion in English is good.

- The considerably diverse learning needs of individuals and groups, including those who are gifted and talented, are met increasingly well through the curriculum and from good support in lessons.
- Subject interventions are well considered, targeted well and engage students successfully.
- Support assistants and specialist staff contribute well to learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising achievement and standards as identified by the school
- improving the consistency and challenge of formative marking so that all students are clear about how to improve; and
- identifying measurable success criteria more effectively in the area improvement plan.

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. 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

Rosemary Matthews
Her Majesty's Inspector