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Mr A Fletcher
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Dear Mr Fletcher

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 28-29 April 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.

Achievement and standards

Standards are average. Achievement is satisfactory.

- Attainment on entry to the school is broadly average.
- In 2007, results for Level 5+ and Level 6+ at Key Stage 3 were above average and showed a small improvement over three years.
- Results for English at Key Stage 4 were average, although A*/A grades were well below average. A significant number of students achieved grade E or below because of weak writing skills. Boys performed less well than girls. Results for Literature were below average, with a significant weakness in the performance of boys overall, notably at the higher grades.
- There is evidence of under-achievement in tests and examinations in recent years although in 2007 better progress by boys contributed to satisfactory progress overall at Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4, only 60% of students met their target grades in English and targets were met by just 25% of Foundation entry students in literature. However, progress

was mostly good in lessons observed and is currently satisfactory overall for most students across the school.

- Standards of speaking and listening are good. Students are confident and articulate communicators and most listen well.
- Provision for personal development is good. Students have good opportunities for pair and group work and readily offer their views in lessons and in reviews of provision.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall.

- Lessons observed were of good quality. They were planned well. Clear objectives, well chosen resources and a good range of teaching and learning strategies, including pair and groupwork, engaged most students successfully. Students collaborated well. Most worked productively and made good progress, although there were intermittent lapses in concentration from some. Some boys were slow to start and complete tasks but caught up quickly when supervised directly.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and well structured sequences to learning challenged most students appropriately. Independent learning was encouraged well in most lessons.
- Although teaching is currently good, students' achievement is limited by weaknesses in planning for continuity and progression within schemes of work.
- The needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were known well, but most planning did not include differentiated provision. However, good relationships between staff and students afforded sensitive support to those struggling with learning.
- Marking showed good examples of support and challenge to help students improve but exercise books do not receive enough attention and the presentation of work within them varies considerably.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Following a fundamental review of provision at Key Stage 3, the department is working to secure consistency, coherence, continuity and progression through curriculum mapping and structured units of work. Similar work is underway at Key Stage 4. Timescales for completion are in place and units completed to date show good examples of clear objectives, assessment strategies and the explicit teaching of skills.
- Well chosen texts offer a broad experience of literature and good opportunities to examine cultural, topical and controversial issues.

Personal reading is promoted strongly at Key Stage 3 with good examples of creative book reviews.

- The use of information technology is developing. Enrichment activities are appropriate in range, although identified as an area for development by students.
- Homework is mostly set regularly and provides a reasonable range of opportunities for independent learning. However, monitoring is difficult and regular completion is of concern to the department.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- Following concerns about the past performance of the English department, provision has been comprehensively reviewed by an external consultant, supported very well by the school and the local authority and regularly monitored. The department is working hard to address weaknesses and well targeted action has resulted in satisfactory progress. Improved collaboration is addressing inconsistencies in provision, strengthening assessment practice and developing a better understanding of underachievement. However, subject leadership does not yet secure sufficiently high standards and teaching is not yet fully effective in improving achievement.
- Interventions are focused well, in particular at Key Stage 4, on improved preparation for tests and examinations and in clear procedures for addressing unwanted behaviour.
- Strategic weaknesses remain. The analysis of English results for 2007 is superficial in its use of data to drive improvement. The resulting action plan does not specifically address improving the performance of boys as a key priority for the department, nor the skills required for improved results in tests and examinations. Success criteria are not sufficiently defined, making progress difficult to measure.

Inclusion

Inclusion in English is satisfactory.

- The needs of learners are met well in most lessons.
- Interventions, particularly in Year 11, are targeted well.
- The dedicated teaching assistant and other support staff provide good support to individuals and groups and contribute well to learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards and achievement, for boys in particular
- completing units of work to timescales
- strengthening the analysis of data to drive improvement, and

- defining measurable success criteria more effectively in the departmental action 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/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

Rosemary Matthews
Her Majesty's Inspector