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Mrs M Golding
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Golding

Ofsted subject survey: good practice in English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 20-21 May 2008 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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: discussions with staff and pupils; scrutiny of documentation and pupils' work; and observation of seven lessons.

Features of good practice observed

- Achievement has been good overall in English in recent years, despite a dip in 2007. Especially good progress is made by pupils with low attainment on entry to the school and pupils for whom English is an additional language.
- Pupils are very positive about their English lessons. They respect the teachers and form good relationships with them. Teachers show a high degree of care for pupils, finding time to support them and taking a personal interest in them.
- Pupils also consider English lessons to be "fun". Lessons are mostly varied, active, and with good opportunities for pupils to work in groups and contribute to discussion.
- Other positive features of teaching include good subject knowledge and enthusiasm. The most effective lessons include effective use of teachers' questioning to engage and challenge pupils.

- The department uses challenging literary texts that motivate pupils well. This leads to good opportunities for interesting discussions about a range of social and moral questions.
- The subject leader has a clear vision for English focused on the central role of literature and the importance of mixed ability grouping. The department is cohesive, well balanced and potentially strong, despite the fact that several teachers are relatively inexperienced. Teachers are increasingly working closely together on sharing resources and re-writing schemes of work.
- Good progress by many pupils with low levels of prior attainment confirms the positive impact of intervention programmes. The considerable commitment of English staff is shown in the out-of-school support for pupils through regular catch-up sessions and the Saturday club. Pupils greatly appreciate this extra support. The department has also reviewed its intervention programme for Year 7 pupils and has developed its own well planned and innovative scheme that is proving popular with pupils.
- The department offers a good range of extra-curricular activities, including regular theatre trips, that significantly enrich pupils' experience of English.

Areas for development

- Improve the achievement of under-performing groups including the more able pupils.
- Review the Key Stage 3 curriculum to ensure it builds in sufficient pace challenge and rigour.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop English in the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Philip Jarrett HMI
Subject Adviser for English