

18 July 2008

Mr V Galyer OBE
Headteacher
Challney High School for Boys
Stoneygate Road
Luton
LU4 9TJ

Dear Mr Galyer

Ofsted subject survey: good practice in English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 08-09 July 2008 to look at work in English. I am very grateful for the time and effort given to the visit despite it coinciding with sports days.

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 students, scrutiny of school documentation and a sample of students' work, and observation of seven part-lessons.

Features of good practice observed

- Provision in English is outstanding.
- Achievement in English is outstanding. Students make progress at both key stages in line with the top 2% of schools nationally. Standards are above those for boys nationally and improving.
- Students are very positive about their experience in English. They appreciate the variety of activities used by teachers to make learning interesting and challenging. They also value teachers' detailed marking of their work and constructive comments for improvement.
- Teachers have very high expectations for students' participation in and response to learning. Relationships are excellent. Teaching is at least good and often outstanding. In particular, teachers work hard to ensure that students are absolutely clear how to make their work better. They focus strongly on the understanding and application of assessment criteria, subject terms and techniques. This approach suits the boys, most of whom come from minority ethnic backgrounds and speak English as an additional language.
- Assessment is a strength of the department. Students know their target level or grade and are made very clear what they need to do to achieve specific standards in each piece of work. This process is exceptionally well

supported by the provision of guidance booklets, bookmarks and place mats which identify key skills and techniques as well as presenting exemplars of writing at different levels. These materials are used routinely in most lessons and link learning objectives to assessment criteria. Students understand this process and are very keen to improve their work, setting themselves ambitious targets.

- Teachers' marking and feedback to students on their work is very detailed. They take pains to correct regular errors and to point out how work should be improved. They provide specific guidance and targets for improvement. Students recognise that this sometimes leads to their work being extensively corrected but they say that this is what helps them to improve, because they are clear about what they need to change.
- The curriculum is broad and offers a range of options at Key Stage 4, including English Literature, performing arts, expressive arts and media. Some students take adult literacy qualifications and the school is piloting functional literacy tests. Schemes of work have already been revised to reflect the new framework for Key Stage 3.
- There is an excellent range of intervention programmes and additional classes which run alongside lessons, after school, in the evenings, weekends and holidays. Some of these run jointly for parents. This programme is well supported and extends learning effectively beyond the school day.
- The minority ethnic achievement project (MEAP) has been used very effectively with target groups of students, clearly raising their achievement, in some cases by three levels during Key Stage 3. The successful practice developed through the project has spread into the full curriculum and students feel strongly that their learning is more interesting and challenging as a result. There are more opportunities to use drama and role play in lessons, greater access to computers, better use of interactive white boards and more discussion and practical activities. A particularly successful initiative involved students in Year 8 identifying books that they would like to read and then working with a local bookshop to purchase them and establish a class library. Attitudes to reading were transformed.
- Literacy is strongly promoted across the curriculum with a drive to achieve common practice in the use of display, teaching of subject terms and approaches to writing.
- The subject leader provides very strong direction for English and literacy in the department, across the school and through the teacher training partnership, which provides many of the school's teachers. Self-evaluation is rigorous and detailed, leading to the constant review of practice. The subject leader sets aspirational targets for improvement despite the already high levels of achievement.
- There is a coherent approach to planning, teaching and learning across the English team but individual teachers are also encouraged to develop their own special interests and strengths. Teachers are reflective about their practice, share approaches and resources, and respond positively to the regular indications of students' views gathered through questionnaires.

Area for development:

- ensuring that teachers take opportunities in planning lessons to match materials and tasks to the differing needs and abilities of students.

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

Martin Cragg
Her Majesty's Inspector