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Mr A Reed
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Dear Mr Reed

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 24-25 September to look at work in English.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject the visit included a focus on our current survey theme of creativity 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 pupils' work and observation of seven lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be satisfactory and improving.

Achievement and standards

Achievement in English overall is satisfactory and improving. Standards are below average.

- In 2008, by the end of Year 11, standards were below average but exceeded the targets set for the college and improved on the 2007 results. Students appear to have made good progress.
- In 2007, students in Year 9 achieved standards which were below the national average. Some of the results for 2008 are currently being challenged by the school. It seems likely that students made satisfactory progress, though less in reading than writing.
- Overall, progress from Year 7 to Year 11 has been satisfactory in recent years.

- Examination data for 2007 indicates that boys made slightly better progress compared to that of girls.
- Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make at least satisfactory and sometimes good progress.
- Those students who speak English as an additional language generally make good progress from their starting points.
- In the lessons observed during this visit, students made generally satisfactory progress. They showed interest in their work and most concentrated well.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

Teaching and learning in English are satisfactory.

- Teachers' subject knowledge is good.
- Teachers plan lessons adequately though some objectives are expressed as tasks. Intended outcomes for the lesson are broken down for different abilities but these are not always shared with the students or translated into work at different levels.
- Relationships in class are strong and most students respond well.
- Most lessons give students effective opportunity to work in pairs or groups but the class discussion which often follows these activities does not always involve a sufficiently wide range of students.
- Systems for assessing students' work and tracking their progress are well established but teachers' comments and the targets set for students vary too much in quality.
- Students who find learning difficult are well supported in class by teaching assistants.

Quality of curriculum

The curriculum in English is good.

- There is a good range of courses available to students at Key Stage 4, including media, English Literature and expressive arts, with many also completing functional skills qualifications. GCSE media and expressive arts are now available in Year 9.
- Schemes of work are well balanced with appropriate coverage of media, non-fiction and poetry.
- The curriculum for Year 7 has been revised effectively to match the new requirements with clear assessment priorities.
- There are good examples of students using their English writing skills in the newly introduced, extended homework projects which are based on other subjects.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management in English are satisfactory and improving.

- The head of faculty knows the strengths and weaknesses of the subject and has relevant plans in place for improvement.
- Students' progress is reviewed regularly and appropriate interventions are made to assist those students who are underachieving.
- Systems for assessment and policies are clear and well focused. However, there are still some inconsistencies in the quality of marking and approaches to planning and teaching.
- Action taken to improve results at Key Stage 4 in 2008 was effective, especially in assisting those working at grade D to achieve a grade C.

Creativity in English

- The team is committed to making learning more active for students, responding to the feedback from their questionnaires.
- There are good examples of students working with external professionals on successful projects in media and the arts. There have been visits by theatre groups and some theatre trips.
- Teachers indicate that they use drama activities, media techniques and computers in lessons but these are not always explicit enough in schemes of work.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that teachers translate the intended learning outcomes in their lesson plans into activities for students at different levels so that they can assess the progress made during lessons
- providing opportunities for all students to participate in whole class discussions
- ensuring that teachers' comments and the targets they set for students provide specific guidance on how to improve their work.

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/Learning and 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

Martin Cragg
Her Majesty's Inspector