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Mr M Southworth
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Southworth

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 15-16 October 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 students' work and observation of seven lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good. Standards are above average.

- Attainment on entry to the school is slightly above average and all groups of students make good progress.
- Key Stage 3 results in 2007 were well above the national average. Unvalidated data for 2008 show continuing high standards.
- In 2007, students at Key Stage 4 did not do as well as expected. Results for higher grade GCSEs were broadly average and too few students gained A* and A grades. Following sharply targeted interventions, unvalidated data for 2008 show good improvement at A* to C grades, a significant increase in A* and A grades and fewer lower grades.
- Standards of speaking and listening are good. Students listen carefully, respectfully and critically and offer well-considered responses, although

many lack the confidence shown in group work to justify their views fully during whole-class discussion.

- English makes a good contribution to the personal development of students through good opportunities for independent and collaborative learning and to contribute to lessons. A highly proactive Student Parliament provides excellent opportunities for public speaking, presentations and debates and makes an exceptional contribution to students' personal development.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- A significant amount of teaching observed was outstanding.
- Enthusiastic and creative teaching engages students well, meets differing needs and promotes collaborative and independent learning strongly. Expectations for all students to achieve well are high and mutually respectful relationships between staff and students and students themselves enhance learning.
- Lessons are planned very well. Objectives and outcomes are clear and well executed through well structured and sequenced learning.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and use a wide range of strategies and good quality resources, including technology, to make lessons challenging and interesting. Skills are carefully and thoroughly taught.
- Good explanations and effective modelling promote independent application and skilful questioning probes and extends learning. Students report improved consistency and quality of teaching during the past year.
- Students enjoy English, behave very well, work hard and make good progress. Targets in units of work map progression well. Assessment of learning increasingly informs planning and underachievement is supported promptly. Strategies for self and peer assessment feature regularly. Careful and supportive marking sets clear targets for improvement and regular and accurate moderation ensures consistency in teacher assessment.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is carefully planned for breadth, balance and progression and reviewed regularly so that teaching builds on students' knowledge and skills systematically.
- Well chosen texts and other materials provide good opportunities to examine cultural, topical and controversial issues. Drama and media are used well to engage students and to extend learning. Good progress has been made in modifying schemes of work at Key Stage 3.

- Students are prepared well for tests and examinations. Teaching gives good attention to learning styles and carefully selected resources are used very well. Good support for individual students, such as in the completion of coursework, leads to good gains in learning and improved attainment.
- Provision for enrichment activities is enhanced by resources from the school's specialist sports status and includes writing workshops from a sports journalist, opportunities for public speaking and competitions. Students appreciate this provision and welcome further extra-curricular opportunities.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management are good.

- Good leadership secures high standards. There is a clear sense of direction for English, with good policies and procedures and a good understanding of strengths and weaknesses. Planning for improvement is informed by comprehensive analysis of performance data. Although monitoring secures consistently good provision, this does not yet comprise a systematic programme of review.
- Good provision for professional development includes support staff who contribute significantly to learning.
- Inclusion is good and the school's sports status provides outstanding support to the department. A wide range of precisely targeted and well evaluated measures are successful in re-engaging underachieving and disaffected students. Effective curricular provision, careful differentiation, tailored support for individuals, systems to track students' progress and regular review of individual targets trigger interventions that have a positive impact on attendance, motivation, behaviour, progress and attainment.

Creativity in English

- Creativity is promoted strongly and a consistent feature of planning for learning. Lessons are characterised by good opportunities for collaboration, in-depth exploration and response to texts and choice in writing.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- sustain improved standards at Key Stage 4
- implement a coherent and systematic programme of monitoring and evaluation.

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

Rosemary Matthews
Her Majesty's Inspector