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Mr P McAteer  
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Dear Mr McAteer

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 09 December 2008 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 four lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good. Standards are average.

- On entry to the school, attainment in English is well below average. Few students have high attainment and the literacy skills of a significant number are very low.
- Students make good progress overall and some make very good progress from low starting points.
- In 2008, the provisional Key Stage 3 results for Level 5+ rose sharply from the previous year and the gap between boys and girls narrowed. Performance in writing was above that of reading.
- At Key Stage 4, results for English Language and English Literature dipped in 2008 to below average and girls significantly outperformed boys at higher grades.

- Standards of speaking and listening are good. Students listen critically, although some struggle with sustained listening, and offer clear and considered responses.
- Standards of handwriting and presentation are inconsistent. While some work is presented very well, too much is unsatisfactory.
- English makes a good contribution to the personal development of students such as through the school council, in good opportunities for collaborative learning, from public speaking and in presentations in lessons.

### Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Creative teaching, well chosen resources and good use of information and communication technology to engage students well, meet differing needs and promote collaborative learning. Expectations are appropriately high, although a minority of students feel insufficiently challenged. Good relationships between staff and students support reluctant learners well.
- Lessons are planned thoroughly. Objectives and outcomes are clear and executed well through structured sequences to learning although independence is not always promoted strongly enough.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge. The diverse learning needs of students are known well and a good range of strategies secure interest and enthusiasm.
- Students enjoy English, behave well and make good progress. Assessment for learning is increasingly informing planning and the targeting of underachievement is increasingly effective.
- Support assistants contribute well to the learning of the lowest attaining students.
- Marking that is mostly careful and supportive sets clear targets for improvement, but shows some inconsistency.
- Regular moderation ensures consistency in teacher assessment.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The English curriculum is broad, balanced and takes good account of students with low levels of literacy skills. Although library facilities are currently limited, some of the impetus for personal reading is maintained. The subject makes an appropriate contribution to the school's business and enterprise status.
- Well chosen texts and other materials provide good opportunities to examine cultural and topical issues. Speaking and listening skills are given good attention, citizenship is included well and media work makes a strong contribution to the engagement of students.

- Students are prepared well for tests and examinations and receive good support for the completion of coursework.
- Satisfactory provision for enrichment activities includes public speaking competitions, projects, theatre visits and visits by theatre groups, but students overwhelmingly identify this as an area for development.
- At post-16, the newly introduced AS level in English Literature and other accreditation is a good response to previous low performance.

## Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management are good.

- Leadership that is focused clearly on raising attainment has continued to do so despite significant adverse conditions from a major building programme. There is a clear sense of direction for English, a good understanding of strengths and weaknesses, strong teamwork and resolute commitment to improvement.
- Comprehensive self-evaluation and good interpretation of performance data informs planning for improvement and increasingly well targeted interventions at Key Stage 3. The progress of learners at post-16 is monitored very closely.
- Assessment for learning is increasingly informing progression.
- Inclusion is good. Students' needs are known well and the progress of the lowest attaining students is tracked carefully. A strong partnership with the special educational needs department and a good range of targeted interventions improve low literacy skills. Tailored support for individuals, including at Key Stage 4, supports lower attaining students and those with English as an additional language very well and results in good gains in learning.

## Creativity in English

Creativity is embedded strongly in the English curriculum and students are given good opportunities for creative learning through collaborative work, exploring texts, performance and writing. Schemes of work are characterised by creative approaches that enhance enjoyment and understanding, such as through drama and media. Lessons take good account of learning styles and cultural emphasis.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards in the performance of boys at higher grade GCSEs and standards at post-16
- improving standards of handwriting and the presentation of work
- strengthening provision for enrichment activities.

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 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