

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040  
F 020 7421 6855  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



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Mr D Spencer  
Headteacher  
Heritage Mathematics and Computing Specialist School  
Boughton Lane  
Clowne  
Derbyshire  
S43 4QG

Dear Mr Spencer

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 8-9 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 six lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement in English is satisfactory. Standards are below average.

- Standards at Key Stage 3 are below average. They have improved over the last five years although the trend is erratic.
- Standards at Key Stage 4 have been slower to improve and remain below average but the proportion of students achieving at least a Grade C in GCSE English reached 50% in 2008.
- Students make satisfactory progress in both key stages with boys performing relatively better than girls in recent years in comparison to the gap in performance nationally. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similar progress to their peers.
- In the lessons observed, students made satisfactory progress. They made better progress in oral activities than in writing.

- Students generally settled well to their work and tried hard. They mostly contributed well to class discussion and through presentations.

### Quality of teaching and learning of English

Teaching and learning are satisfactory with some good features.

- Teachers plan lessons thoroughly with clear learning objectives. These are broken down into three levels of expected outcomes but ensuing work is not pitched at different levels to assist students in achieving the separate objectives.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is good and they ensure that students understand and use appropriate subject terms.
- Lessons contain a variety of active approaches to learning including effective use of interactive white boards, computers for research and presentation, group and paired work, and role play.
- Relationships in classes are very good and allow teachers to maintain suitable pace in activities.
- Teachers' use of questioning to develop and assess learning varies in quality. Teachers do not always take opportunities to involve students by getting them to question and review others' work and ideas. On occasions, teachers tend to demonstrate how to complete a task rather than engaging students in understanding the process of composing a piece of writing.
- Assessment systems are thorough and students' progress is tracked regularly.
- Teachers' marking is regular and provides positive comment although there is variation in the quality of guidance given to students on how to improve their work.

### Quality of curriculum

The curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- At Key Stage 3, the curriculum is broad and balanced with speaking and listening activities embedded well into the schemes of work.
- At Key Stage 4, the curriculum is relatively narrow at present but there are plans to diversify choices for students and to introduce a media course.
- Computers and other technology are increasingly used effectively with digital cameras used to provide material for writing activities in the recent Year 7 induction unit.
- Students participate regularly in drama-based work, group and paired activities and presentations to the class.

## Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management are good.

- The department is in a period of transition but work well as a team and share expertise.
- The subject leader has set a clear vision for English based on giving teachers the responsibility for the detailed planning of lessons within an overall curriculum framework.
- There are thorough systems for monitoring and evaluating the performance of the subject, including regular tracking of students' progress.
- The subject leader has led developments in teaching and learning effectively, promoting a greater focus on active learning, speaking and listening.
- Standards are rising and the subject leader has managed the transitional stage with new staff well.

## Creativity in English

- Increasingly, the curriculum in English encourages creative responses from students.
- There are examples of effective use of creative practitioners such as the storyteller who worked with Year 7 in the recent induction unit.
- Students are used to working collaboratively and, in the better lessons, making decisions about their learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that teachers match work to the differentiated learning objectives in their planning and to students' needs
- developing teachers' use of questioning and discussion to involve students fully in extending and improving their ideas and opinions
- developing the curriculum, especially at Key Stage 4, to provide flexibility for students to build on their strengths and interests so that standards improve further.

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 and Local Learning 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