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Mr K Prunty  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Prunty

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 10 -11 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 pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of eight lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards in English

Achievement is outstanding. Standards are above average by the end of Key Stage 4 and average in the sixth form.

- Achievement is outstanding as students enter with below average standards, yet progress very well throughout the school. This includes students who overcome potentially significant barriers to learning, including those who join the school late or those at an early stage of learning English.
- In this ethnically very diverse college, over the past three years, the two largest groups of students, Indian and White British heritage students, achieved better than students elsewhere from similar backgrounds. There was no under-achievement by any group of students.

- The pass rate in English is above national average at both GCSE and A level. However more students have the potential to gain the highest grades at both levels. Very high grades are attained in media studies at GCSE and A level.
- The students' determination to succeed, and their respect for each others' achievement, are noteworthy features of college life.

### Quality of teaching and learning of English

Teaching and learning are outstanding.

- Teachers use a very creative range of activities and resources. They consciously use very clear language which ensures that students with English as an Additional Language (EAL) can follow instructions, but at the same time elucidates the intended learning for the whole class.
- In mixed ability classes, students are given a range of challenges and opportunities to succeed, so that all are engaged and learn well. For example, in one lesson observed, high ability students had been assigned to each group. This enabled all students to respond to the written text, probing and modifying suggestions; as a result, the analytical abilities of the whole group were developed.
- Support for students with EAL, or with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD), is stimulating and confers independence.
- Students thoroughly understand and respond to the consistently applied system of marking.
- Just occasionally teachers try activities that do not relate clearly enough to the aim of the lesson and students lose focus.

### Quality of curriculum in English

The curriculum is outstanding.

- It is well constructed, very engaging and wide ranging, including well-resourced media studies, at all levels. As a result, the department has been invited to create and pilot schemes of work which have now been adopted as exemplar materials for the revised Secondary National Strategy.
- There is effective profiling and induction, followed by outstanding support for students entering the school from abroad and for those with LDD. A local authority unit on site provides students with mainstream experience in the college.
- There is a wide range of enrichment activity in English, some examples of which are referred to in the creativity section below.

## Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management are outstanding.

- There is a high degree of consistency in the department, arising from effective strategic recruitment and training practices.
- The department is used as a model of good leadership and innovation within the local authority.
- Consistent marking and record keeping support target setting and achievement across the department.
- An evidence-based and well focussed improvement plan is in place and appropriate steps have been taken to increase the proportion of highest grades at GCSE and A level. This includes revision sessions organised for ability groups and restructuring the A level course.
- There is highly effective delegation to the head of media studies and the second in charge of English. The vision and values of the department are thoroughly distributed and implemented.

## Creativity in English

- As the college song – itself a creative initiative involving students in contributing to the making of a professional DVD - says, the students are on journeys of personal growth and the English department significantly contributes to this.
- Through imaginative planning by teachers, many opportunities are created in lessons for students to engage with difficult but rewarding tasks. Clear instructions and structured steps enable all students to engage and contribute. The depth of engagement is reflected in the good amount and high quality of written work produced.
- In a Media Studies lesson in Year 12, the teacher had enabled the students to take complete responsibility for their learning. They thoroughly understood their progress and goals from recording their learning in blogs submitted to the exam board. Two students in particular had collaborated to film the opening sequence of a “thriller” in which linked images gradually suggested tragedy and desire for revenge. The selection of background music from Mozart’s “Requiem”, alongside the contemporary images within a sensitive interpretation of a film genre, displayed the students’ creative ability to absorb and merge diverse cultural influences.
- “Reading Challenge” sessions before school bring sixth formers and younger students together imaginatively in partnerships that are not limited by race or gender.
- Students were very proud of a recent “Excellence in English” evening at which they had displayed their talents as writers and their knowledge of English “through the ages”.
- This is the second year of a published author’s “residency” during which he inspires – and says he is in turn inspired by – writing by sixth formers under the aegis of an organisation “First Story” set up by a

former teacher at the school. The scheme has become established in a wide range of schools and Cranford is a thriving base at which attendance is high and mutual appreciation is constructively critical. Students were deeply motivated to explore and appreciate their memories and emotional development through autobiography and other genres. An editorial committee is planning the next printed anthology. I greatly enjoyed the stories in the first one.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- securing even better achievement at the highest grades at both GCSE and A level.

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

Tony Byrne  
Additional Inspector