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18 February 2009

Mr C Morris  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Morris

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 11-12 February 2009 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 observations of seven lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be satisfactory but improving.

#### Achievement and standards

Standards in English are above average overall. Students' achievement is satisfactory.

- Standards on entry are above average in English. The school receives more students at the higher Level 5 than most schools. Standards remain above average as students move through the school, as consistently shown by GCSE results in English and English literature.
- GCSE results from 2006-8 show a consistent trend of improvement. Work seen during the visit confirms a continuing upward trend in Year 11, but overall standards are not yet high enough for achievement to be judged as good across Key Stage 4.

- Improving GCSE standards reflect good teaching which is focussing more sharply on the skills Year 11 students need to cope effectively with assessment requirements. Progress was good in most lessons observed.
- GCSE results show that girls do considerably better than boys. Weaknesses in boys' technical accuracy in writing, spelling and sentence constructions undermine their standards. The writing of a small but significant minority of middle attaining girls also reveals weaknesses in spelling.
- Recent results suggest that lower attaining students and the small number of students with statements of educational needs tend to make better progress than most students.
- Significantly improved teaching, curriculum and assessment procedures in Key Stage 3 are resulting in students in Years 7-9 making good progress.
- Students behave well and work with enthusiasm. They respond positively to the good variety of activities they are asked to do.

### Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Improvements in teaching are leading to enhanced outcomes throughout the school. Good leadership of the subject is a key factor in this improvement. The subject leader has firmly set the agenda on raising standards and successfully gained the committed support of her team.
- Students convey a sense of enjoyment and pride in their work. Many say English is among their favourite subjects.
- Lesson observations confirmed that relationships between teachers and students are strong. There is a very positive working atmosphere in lessons. The teachers' explicit use of lesson objectives ensures students are clear about what they are doing and that learning is purposeful. Lesson activities are meticulously planned and there are many opportunities for well-reasoned discussion. There are some excellent resources such as the use of moving image texts and well-chosen fiction texts.
- Assessment is a real strength, especially in Years 7-9. The thorough implementation of the Assessment of Students' Progress initiative (APP) is clearly promoting good progress in reading and writing. Throughout the school students display an accurate knowledge of how well they are doing and of how to improve their levels or grades, reflecting their teachers' consistently good written and oral feedback.
- When lessons observed were less effective they tended to be over-planned and over-managed. Consequently students had insufficient time to work independently in a sustained manner.

## Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The department offers a satisfactory range of courses overall with good provision at Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4, while most students sit GCSE English literature, there is an absence of alternative or additional qualifications.
- A weakness of the Key Stage 4 curriculum is its imbalance. Too much time is spent on course work, to the detriment of the students' preparation for end of course assessments.
- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is good and has some major attributes. All students have equal access to its content. Each unit is driven by a concise number of assessment focuses, regularly assessed through a range of inventive tasks. Their impact on progress is substantial. Students regard the assessment tasks as special and their work on these tasks shows how much they want to do well. The tasks are also providing increased opportunities for extended writing. The units are carefully mapped to ensure coverage of a full range of skills.
- There are some satisfactory opportunities to use information and communications technology (ICT). The students in one Year 7 class maintain a lively reading blog with their teacher and fellow students. Another Year 7 class produces podcasts of their dramatized radio plays. Enrichment events such as reading weeks and debating days are popular.

## Leadership and management of English

The quality of leadership and management is good.

- The subject leader provides a highly professional role model. She is an extremely good classroom practitioner. Her professionalism is respected by colleagues and students alike. Members of her team work very well together, jointly planning schemes of work and lesson plans. This good level of cooperation reflects the department's shared commitment to continuing to raise standards.
- Since her appointment in January 2007 the subject leader has vigorously pursued an agenda of improving outcomes. The impact is clear in the sustained and continuous improvement in standards. Her planning is very strategic. On the one hand there is a range of short-term interventions to help targeted students in the current Year 11 make up lost ground; on the other hand revisions in Key Stage 3 reflect a longer-term strategy of achieving better learning for succeeding cohorts.
- Improvements are based on good analysis of examination data that accurately identify strengths and weaknesses. Consequently lessons in Year 11 are currently dealing with technical weaknesses among middle

attaining boys and the overly long answers of higher attaining girls which are preventing some securing their grade A\*/A targets.

- The new internal assessment system is bedding in well but there has been limited analysis of its data to identify where intervention can achieve further improvement. Action planning is good but its success criteria are not sufficiently based on outcomes. There are very robust systems for monitoring marking but the involvement of the subject leader in systematic lesson observation is underdeveloped. While revised units of work are good there is scope to ensure they reflect cultural diversity more comprehensively.

### Creativity in English

The department is enhancing the students' creativity through its revised curriculum at Key Stage 3. Lessons observations and work scrutiny revealed many opportunities to manipulate language to achieve an impact on the reader or listener. A newspaper production project for Year 9 students reflects the school's business and enterprise specialism. A particularly imaginative project saw collaboration with religious education teachers on the Island theme. Year 7 students spent a day "exploring" their island discovery, and produced an impressive range of writing on its origins which included sacred texts, verse and reportage.

Areas for improvement which we discussed included:

- raising achievement, especially for middle attaining boys
- making explicit use of Key Stage 3 assessment data to target weaknesses in learning and progress, especially spelling and sentence constructions
- amending the balance of the Key Stage 4 curriculum so students are fully prepared for success in their end of course examinations.

I hope these observations are useful to you 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 at the next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Chris Griffin  
Additional Inspector