

23 March 2009

Mr R Broadbridge  
Headteacher  
Dene Magna School  
Abenhall Road  
Mitcheldean  
Gloucestershire  
GL17 ODU

Dear Mr Broadbridge

Ofsted subject survey: good practice in English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 18 March 2009 to look at work 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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: discussions with the headteacher, the head of English and a group of Year 11 students; observation of five parts of lessons; and analysis of documentation and students' work.

Features of good practice observed

- Students make outstanding progress. They enter the school with average standards, although there are fewer students than the national proportion with very high attainment. They finish Year 11 with standards that are well above average in English. In the GCSE examinations in 2008, the students' achievement was exceptionally high when compared with that of similar students in England.
- The quality of teaching and learning is excellent. The school and the department place learning at the heart of all meetings and strategic planning. Teachers have many more opportunities to observe and discuss teaching than is usually the case. Meticulous and flexible lesson planning ensures that activities are linked to the individual needs of students very clearly.
- Lessons are brisk and purposeful, with a variety of activities which are carefully devised to engage students in their learning and to promote specific skills. Learning objectives are clear and the students have ample

opportunity to reflect on their learning during the course of lessons. Excellent questioning probes students' understanding well.

- Relationships between students and adults are exceptionally good. Students report that they have full confidence in their teachers and speak enthusiastically about aspects of their work at GCSE, such as the set Shakespeare text and the poetry element of the course.
- Careful attention to individual students is linked to giving them confidence and skills as independent learners by involving them in a rich variety of paired, group and whole-class activities. Students also value the occasions when they are given the chance to teach certain topics to their peers, commenting that preparation for this significantly improves their own knowledge and skills in English.
- Students are productively involved in the assessment process. A variety of assessment methods gives students the opportunity to assess their own work and that of their peers. With the careful guidance of teachers, this enables them to improve their standards. Consequently, students become skilled in assessing their own work, to the extent that for some tasks students confidently negotiate the assessment methods to be used. Students speak knowledgeably about the quality of their own work and what they are doing to improve it.
- Information and communication technology is used very productively to extend learning beyond the classroom and promote skills within lessons. The school's Virtual Learning Environment is used extensively by students to seek clarification from teachers and to discuss their work.
- The English department is excellently led and managed. Work is distributed and shared between the talented team of specialist teachers who work together very effectively. The views of students are regularly sought and they play an important role in helping to devise units of work with teachers. Monitoring and evaluation is a regular and routine part of the everyday life of the department, with a clear focus on continuing to improve on the already excellent quality of teaching and learning.
- The English curriculum is broad and balanced. Schemes of work respond well to the requirements of the National Curriculum whilst ensuring that teachers can modify them to meet the needs of particular students and classes. Careful planning ensures that schemes of work are delivered effectively in classrooms so that students make exceptional progress and thoroughly enjoy their English lessons. However, students report that there are few opportunities to participate in trips and that they do not benefit from visits to the school by professionals such as writers or actors. Discussions with students also showed that although they were very enthusiastic about the poetry, plays and novels that they read in school, this did not lead them to read independently.

#### Areas for development

- Develop strategies to promote wider reading in the school and increase opportunities for students to develop their skills beyond the routine of classroom activities.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop English in the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority/local Learning and Skills Council and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Harrett  
Her Majesty's Inspector