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Mr G Tyrer  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Tyrer

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 18-19 May 2009 to look at work in English.

As outlined in my initial letter the visit focused on key areas of the subject. It 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 seven lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be good.

#### Achievement and standards

Achievement in English is good. Standards are above average and improving.

- In 2008, standards at Key Stage 4 were above average and students made at least satisfactory progress. The current Year 11 students, according to school assessment data and confirmed Year 10 GCSE results, are likely to exceed the school's target and to make good progress overall.
- At Key Stage 3, standards were well above average in 2007 and 2008. Students made very good progress.
- In the sixth form, students achieve results in line with or above the national average and make good progress.
- The department has worked hard to improve boys' achievement, especially higher ability boys, which they had identified as an area for

development. Revisions to the Key Stage 4 curriculum, including early entry for GCSE English have improved results for those students identified and overall. Students who find learning difficult or have disabilities achieve at least as well as their peers.

- In the lessons observed, students made generally good progress. They settled to work well, concentrated effectively and showed understanding of what they needed to do. They worked well collaboratively. However, the extent to which they were challenged to think and work independently varied from class to class.

### Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons in detail with clear objectives. They use a sound variety of approaches to learning. In the better lessons, teachers adjusted their approaches effectively to suit students' understanding and interests.
- Lessons are generally well-structured and teachers maintain appropriate pace. However, on occasions, teachers spent too long talking or moved students on before they fully understood key ideas.
- In the best lessons, teachers used a good variety of questions and discussion techniques, ensuring wide participation and challenging students to think deeply. However, in some lessons, questions lacked depth and answers were restricted to students who volunteered.
- Teachers' marking is thorough and their comments relate to learning objectives. Most teachers provide targets for students to improve their work and assessment criteria are used effectively, including by students in evaluating each other's work in lessons.
- There is a good system for collating and analysing students' progress and this is used well to identify those who are underachieving.

### Quality of curriculum

The curriculum in English is good.

- The curriculum is broad and, increasingly, materials are matched carefully to the particular ability and interests of classes.
- Schemes of work are very detailed and assessment opportunities are integrated well. Activities involving the use of computers and other technologies are identified, although students say that the frequency of use varies from class to class.
- The curriculum is reviewed constantly and there is a clear vision for improving its effect on students' enjoyment and motivation.
- Thematic days and a week of integrated topics contribute well to the breadth and focus of the Key Stage 3 programme.

- The Key Stage 4 curriculum is flexible and Year 10 students now enter GCSE English before choosing from different courses in Year 11. This initiative contributes to improving standards and student motivation.
- Senior staff have audited approaches to literacy across the school. There is a very good range of literacy support activities across the curriculum, including Year 10 students who teach approaches to punctuation to younger students.
- There is a very good range of enrichment and extension activities for a variety of students, including those who are gifted or talented. The support available to those with learning difficulties is very effective.

## Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management in English are good.

- The head of department has managed the department with perseverance during a period of staffing instability and has maintained and improved standards during this time.
- The subject leaders have conducted a thorough review of provision and identified appropriate priorities for development.
- There is a programme of regular monitoring of teaching and marking. Data on students' performance is analysed thoroughly and effective action taken to support classes where progress may be slower or individuals who are underachieving.
- Increasingly, students are engaged in providing feedback on courses and aspects of lessons to inform developments.
- The initiatives taken recently to adjust the curriculum, raise motivation and target students for intervention have contributed to the rising trend in results at all levels.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that the best features of teaching are shared across the department to improve the quality of students' learning
- developing the range of teachers' strategies for questioning and promoting discussion to encourage students to think and learn independently.

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 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

Martin Cragg  
Her Majesty's Inspector