

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



03 July 2009

Mr M Wright
Headteacher
Leyland St Mary's High School
Royal Avenue
Leyland
Lancashire
PR25 1BS

Dear Mr Wright

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 02-03 June 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 spelling and handwriting. 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 seven lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Standards in English are above average. Students' achievement is good.

- Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 are consistently above average. Results were especially good in GCSE courses last year with a large majority of students obtaining A*-C grades in both English and English Literature. However, fewer students achieved grades A*/A than might have been expected. The gap between girls' and boys' attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is not as wide as the national trend.
- Standards on entry to the school in Year 7 are variable but tend to be slightly above average. Students' achievement is good across Key Stages 3 and 4, regularly placing the school in the top performing 25% of schools. Boys make at least as much progress as girls in English and

this is better than the national picture. Other groups of students, including those who enter with below average attainment, achieve equally well. However, evidence suggests that more students should convert high performance at the end of key Stages 2 and 3 into achievement at the top grades in GCSE.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning of English is good.

- Most students are very positive about lessons in English. They enjoy lessons that are lively, varied and interesting. They value the support of teachers and opportunities to participate fully.
- Teaching and learning are good overall. There is a strong core of good and outstanding teaching in English that can be used to demonstrate good practice. However, there is some variability in quality across the department that potentially limits the achievement of students.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very strong in most classes. Teachers are mostly confident, lively and enthusiastic. Lessons engage students well because teachers make use of a range of active approaches, supported by varied and interesting resources. Teachers explain things well and find time to provide support, where needed.
- In the best lessons observed, teachers managed discussion well, involving all students and encouraging them to develop their answers. In some lessons, teachers relied too much on those students who called out answers and this reduced the involvement of less confident students.
- In the less effective lessons, learning objectives were not routinely shared with students. Sometimes, this was accompanied by weaknesses in planning that led to a lack of clarity about the intended learning.
- The quality of marking varies significantly across the department. The marking of GCSE coursework is mostly detailed and thorough. Practice at Key Stage 3 is less consistent. The best, reflecting new approaches in Year 7, is very good, giving clear feedback on progress against the assessment focuses and levels reached, with clear guidance on areas for improvement. Work is under-marked by some teachers with too few comments about the next steps for students.

Quality of curriculum

The curriculum in English is good.

- The English curriculum is successful at enthusing students leading to good progress. Most students are entered for GCSE English Literature and a few lower attaining students follow an entry level GCSE course. GCSE Drama is also available as an option choice for a small number of students.

- The department operates a flexible approach at Key Stage 3 with good choice for teachers. The outline programme has good range and balance, with some interesting features such as the development of the English language and talk-based units.
- New schemes of work are currently being written in line with changes to the curriculum at Key Stage 3. These build in a stronger sense of progression, identify key learning objectives and integrate assessment well throughout the programme.
- Extensive additional support is provided for students outside lessons to improve their work in the GCSE course. However, this means that fewer enrichment activities are available, although the department is currently exploring how to expand its cross-curricular provision.
- The department supports reading through a drama/reading lesson for Year 8 students and a library scheme of work in Year 7. Some teachers continue to promote independent reading at other times but practice is inconsistent across the department.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is not used extensively to support lessons in English. The curriculum includes the analysis of films but there are too few opportunities for students to use computers and other technology such as digital cameras.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management are good.

- The department is well led by a passionate and committed teacher. She models good practice well both in her own teaching and in her relationships with students. She is honest and self-critical. She has a clear view of the contribution of English to students' development and this is well expressed in the departmental aims.
- Teachers also appreciate the independence and flexibility available to them to choose texts and activities. This freedom works well because teachers cooperate effectively, share ideas and plan work together.
- The head of department recognises the contribution that others can make to the department and encourages them to exercise responsibility in areas such as drama, assessment and the Key Stage 3 curriculum.
- Teachers work well together. There is regular standardisation and moderation of students' work. There is good informal sharing and monitoring of practice, alongside formal activities such as lesson observations. However, inconsistencies in provision in areas like marking suggest that there are currently too few opportunities for formal monitoring and evaluation.
- The department has identified some appropriate priorities for improvement including the achievement of higher attaining students, assessment and implementation of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum. There is a brief departmental self evaluation; however, it lacks detail and as a result tends to be a little generous in its key judgements. A

more thorough consideration of the full range of evidence would improve the quality of the self-evaluation and contribute towards a more detailed subject improvement plan.

Spelling and handwriting

The current Key Stage 3 scheme of work identifies aspects of spelling to be taught each year. In practice, this does not happen consistently and students do not receive a great deal of explicit guidance with improving spelling. Spelling is largely addressed at present through teachers' marking. However, there is variability in teachers' practice. Some teachers frequently correct mistakes in spelling; others rarely do so. There is little evidence that such corrections have a sustained impact on students' spelling and they are rarely expected to do anything as a result of the teacher's corrections.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increasing the number of students who obtain A*/A grades in English and English Literature at GCSE
- extending the use by students of ICT in English.

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

Philip Jarrett HMI
Subject Adviser for English