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Ms K Kernan  
Acting Headteacher  
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Dear Ms Kernan

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 10-11 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 eight lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement in English is good. Standards are above average.

- In 2008, Year 11 students made good progress to reach standards that were above average.
- At Key Stage 3, the school has registered appeals on some results from 2008. However, standards were above average and students made at least good progress, continuing a sustained trend of good achievement.
- Standards in the sixth form have been broadly average recently and students made satisfactory progress.

- The school's assessment information for current students, including those in the sixth form, indicates that they are likely to reach their targets and exceed last year's results.
- There is no significant difference between the performance of girls and boys compared to the national pattern. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make at least similar progress to their peers because of very effective intervention.
- In the lessons observed, students made generally good progress and enjoyed their learning. They concentrated well and worked together effectively. They contributed confidently and most answered willingly and participated in discussion.

### Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers plan lessons thoroughly with clear objectives which they explain carefully to students. Lessons are well structured and well managed, although there was insufficient time at the end of some lessons to test students' understanding and identify gaps in learning.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is good and they routinely reinforce key terms and concepts with students.
- Relationships in lessons are very good and enhance learning.
- Teachers use a good variety of activities with most lessons containing opportunities for students to work in pairs or groups. However, in some lessons, students had to listen to the teacher for too long.
- In most lessons, teachers' questioning challenged students to explain and justify ideas, although some questioning in satisfactory lessons did not encourage weaker or quieter students to participate.
- Teachers used interactive white boards effectively to structure lessons and engage students' interest.
- Systems for target setting and assessment are very good and used consistently. Teachers' marking is thorough, related to objectives and gives good guidance to students on how to improve their work.
- In the best lessons, students assess their own work and that of their peers but this varies in frequency and quality across classes.

### Quality of curriculum

The curriculum in English is outstanding.

- The curriculum is broad and covers a full range of genres, text types and media. It is also flexible, allowing some students to progress at a faster rate or providing others with additional support to consolidate their literacy skills. As a result, there are a number of alternative programmes available to meet students' needs.
- Schemes of work are very detailed, focused on key skills and assessment objectives, and contain very clear guidance for teachers.

- There is an exceptional range of interventions and literacy support which strongly enhance the curriculum and aid students' achievement.
- There is a very good range of enrichment opportunities with a good focus on promoting students' reading for pleasure.

## Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management in English are good.

- Good leadership has brought about sustained improvement in achievement. The subject leader sets a very clear direction for English and promotes very effective teamwork and appropriate training.
- Monitoring of provision is thorough and leads to accurate self evaluation which identifies appropriate priorities.
- Plans are succinct and actions clearly identified although success criteria are not always measurable.
- The structure of the curriculum is innovative and the department has made good progress in revising Key Stage 3 units of work.
- Assessment systems are rigorous and help students to understand what they need to improve.

## Spelling and handwriting

- Most students write appropriately for their age and ability.
- A minority of students, identified by the school, require assistance in improving their handwriting. The handwriting intervention programme offered to small groups of these students has proved effective.
- Students are generally aware that they need to check their spelling. Teachers correct key spelling errors in their marking of work but there is no consistent approach to help students learn from their errors.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that all teaching matches the quality of the best by involving all students actively in discussion and challenging them to explain and justify their opinions.

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