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Mr D Franklin
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Dear Mr Franklin

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 16-17 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 part-lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement in English is good. Standards are above average.

- Standards at the end of Year 11 in 2008 improved and were above average, especially in English Literature. The current Year 11 students have already gained a higher proportion of A*- A and A*- C grades than last year in GCSE English, taken in November 2008. They made good progress from their starting points.
- Provisional results for Year 9 students in 2008 also improved and were well above average. Students made at least good progress.
- Girls generally make slightly better progress than boys in relation to the pattern nationally. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similar progress to their peers.

- In the lessons observed, students made generally good progress. Those students with particular learning needs were well supported by teaching assistants.
- Students work very well collaboratively and try hard. They contribute willingly to discussion when given the opportunity and enjoy more active approaches to learning.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons thoroughly with clear learning objectives. Lessons are well managed and conducted at an appropriate pace.
- Teachers use a good variety of activities to aid learning with regular pair and group work. However, in some lessons, teachers too often rely on volunteers to answer questions, thus missing opportunities to involve all students.
- Relationships are very good and enhance learning.
- In the better lessons, teachers ensure that students know exactly what is required, often using marking criteria. Increasingly, students assess their own work and that of their peers using these criteria.
- Teachers' marking is thorough and their comments relate to the objectives for the work. Students mostly know their targets and what they need to do to improve but there is no consistent system at Key Stage 3 for teachers to pass this information to them.

Quality of curriculum

The curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is suitably broad and covers the expected range of topics, although students report varying use of computers across English classes.
- Schemes of work are well organised and there is a good range of supporting materials. These schemes are currently under review to reflect the new national guidance and confirm assessment tasks.
- Students benefit from regular opportunities to develop their speaking and listening skills through active pair and group work.
- The Key Stage 4 curriculum is well organised and students now complete coursework in Year 10 before taking GCSE English in November of Year 11. This enables them to focus subsequently on English Literature or to re-sit English to achieve a higher grade.
- There is a sound range of extra curricular activities including theatre trips and events to promote reading.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management in English are good.

- The subject leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of provision which they have used well to devise an appropriate action plan. They set a clear direction for the subject and have maintained improvement in achievement during a period of changes in staffing.
- They set clear expectations for teachers and promote good team work and sharing of effective practice. This can be seen in the effective use of electronic resources to support teaching.
- Nevertheless, there is still some inconsistency in teaching approaches and aspects of assessment which the team have rightly identified as requiring improvement.

Spelling and handwriting

- Most students' handwriting and spelling is appropriate for their age.
- There is a good whole school literacy policy supported by an effective programme to improve aspects of students' spelling which is delivered in tutor time. This covers different spelling rules, strategies for learning spellings and key subject terms.
- There is a handwriting programme for a small group of students, run on a weekly basis in lesson time.
- In English, teachers identify key spelling errors through their marking but it is less clear how students are subsequently helped to improve their spelling.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that all teaching reaches the quality of the best, especially in the use of questioning, involvement of all students and checking of learning as lessons develop
- developing consistent systems to ensure that students know their targets and what they need to do to achieve them
- ensuring that all students have opportunities to study and use modern media, technologies and means of communication in the curriculum.

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