

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



30 November 2009

Mr P Stewart
Headteacher
Harper Green School
Harper Green Road
Farnworth
Bolton
BL4 0DH

Dear Mr Stewart

Ofsted survey inspection programme – English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 14 and 15 October 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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of six lessons and a short visit to one further lesson.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is good.

- Students' results at GCSE in 2009 were below average but a great improvement on the low attainment of previous years. In English language, 46% achieved A* to C grades compared with only 28% the year before. The standards attained represented good progress from the students' low starting point. Much of that progress was made in Key Stage 4. The current Year 11 students are on course for broadly average attainment.

- Students are now making good progress in lessons in response to predominantly good teaching. There is, however, a legacy of previous underachievement which remains to be overcome, mainly in Key Stage 3.
- Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and students who are learning English as an additional language are provided for well by a range of effective additional support they receive. Consequently, they also make good progress.
- Most students have positive attitudes to learning. They want to do as well as they can and take a good degree of responsibility for their own progress.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- In the lessons observed, the teaching was good with a small amount that was of an outstanding quality.
- Typically, teachers use their good subject knowledge well to plan lessons that interest students and deepen their understanding. They expect a lot of the students and constantly challenge them to achieve their best. Relationships between staff and students are positive and teachers manage students' behaviour well. However, in some of the lower sets there are a number of students who are not well-motivated and some with behavioural difficulties. At times, these factors hinder the pace of learning for all, despite teaching that has many good features.
- The most successful lessons are conducted at a brisk pace in a businesslike atmosphere. They include a good variety of well-managed activities and tasks that motivate the students and keep them all fully involved and working hard.
- There were two main reasons why some of the teaching seen, though largely good, was not quite so effective. Firstly, teachers talked for too long so there was limited time for students to develop their ideas orally or to complete their tasks. Secondly, not all students were fully involved and working throughout the lesson.
- Students' work is generally marked helpfully so they can see what they have achieved and where they need to focus their efforts in future. However, this is not yet consistent across the department.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is carefully planned and covers all that is required.
- While literature is a component of English courses for students throughout the school, only around 40% of students take a GCSE in English literature; this is considerably below the national average.
- The range of intervention and support for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is very good and is underpinned by good specialist knowledge and analysis of the students' individual needs.

- Provision for students with English as an additional language is equally good. It focuses on improving the attainment of these students where it is lower than the school's average.
- The school offers some enrichment activities within school time and beyond, such as theatre visits, and some clubs related to English but this provision is not extensive.
- A good start has been made in planning for students to use and develop literacy skills across subjects, an issue for improvement raised at the school's most recent inspection in February this year. However, the plans are not yet specific enough to ensure coherence and progression in such work in all subjects.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

- The senior team supports the leadership and management of English very well. The newly appointed head of department has been enabled to contribute quickly and has already identified several appropriate areas for development in the subject.
- The interest taken in the subject by senior staff is a key strength. For example, several members of the senior leadership team act as mentors for students who are at risk of underachieving in English. Funds and staff have been allocated to English and adjustments made to the curriculum, such as entering some students for GCSE in Year 10. Such decisions have supported the successful drive to raise attainment.
- Good support for teaching and learning is provided through a range of additional training. This is supplemented by regular teaching and learning 'bulletins' which offer well-founded advice and practical tips for teachers in an attractive and readable format.
- The school has a programme of regular assessment of students' attainment and their rate of progress. The outcomes are analysed in detail so the English department has all the data it needs. Within the department, however, data are not used effectively to monitor whether all students are doing as well as they should through each year in school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the use of assessment data to monitor students' attainment and progress
- developing the planning for students to use and develop literacy skills across subjects
- enhancing the curriculum by
 - increasing the take-up of English literature at GCSE
 - developing the range of enrichment activities.

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 will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be made available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Pat Kime
Her Majesty's Inspector