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Mr J Robson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Robson

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 3 and 4 November 2009 to look at work in English.

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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is outstanding.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is outstanding.

- Attainment is consistently high at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4. The unvalidated results for GCSE English in 2009 showed that standards were considerably higher than in 2008. The school also entered most students for GCSE English literature in 2009 and they performed equally well in that examination.
- The contextual value-added data, supported by other evidence, show that progress by students from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 in recent years has been well above average, placing the school in the top 10% nationally. Traditionally, students have done better in English at Key Stage 3, but the most recent results confirm higher rates of progress than before at Key Stage 4.

- Boys achieve as well as girls in English; this is better than the national picture. Able students also do very well, as reflected in the higher-than-average proportion of higher grades at the end of both key stages. Other groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, achieve equally well. In the past, some groups of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities appear to have progressed less well but recent changes to the curriculum are designed to improve this.
- Students behave very well and are keen to do their best. They work well both alone and when collaborating in small groups. Many students are confident in expressing their views and extremely articulate. Students make especially good progress where teachers give them opportunities to think for themselves and to use their initiative.

### Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- Most students enjoy their English lessons. Teaching observed varied somewhat in quality but was good overall. The very best was outstanding.
- Particularly effective aspects of teaching included: very good management of students' behaviour; strong relationships and good teacher subject knowledge; effective use of praise to motivate students; the use of a wide range of lively activities; and a pleasant classroom environment with good display work.
- In some lessons, learning objectives were not always clear enough and teachers needed to give students more time to learn fully from the activities. At times, teachers needed to be more alert to the needs of the full range of ability in the class and to check more thoroughly that all students had understood and were making progress.
- The quality of marking is consistently good. Teachers mark in detail and give helpful feedback on strengths and weaknesses. Teachers are beginning to make systematic use of curricular targets for students and assessment criteria are identified clearly within lessons. However, comments in books by teachers do not always lead to improvements in students' work.

### Quality of the curriculum in English

The curriculum in English is good.

- The department provides English and English literature courses at GCSE for nearly all students. It also offers options in drama and media studies; this meets students' needs very well.
- Students enjoy the English curriculum, although some students expressed the view that there were more opportunities for creative work at Key Stage 3 and that fewer opportunities for independent thinking were provided in the GCSE courses.

- There are some innovative elements to the Key Stage 3 curriculum. Drama is an integral part of the course and much enjoyed by students. The department has a well-considered approach to promoting wider reading. There is a good emphasis on the study of literary texts alongside some lively media work. Good use is also being made of some challenging, contemporary fiction for students. However, information and communication technology is currently underused by students in English lessons.
- Enrichment activities make a very good contribution to students' experience of English in the school. Teachers offer a range of clubs including a film club and a drama club. Reading is promoted through a number of additional activities, many involving the library, such as Carnegie Shadowing and a Readathon. There are regular theatre visits and visits by writers. Support is also provided outside lessons for underachieving students through revision sessions and an Easter class. This all reflects the hard work and commitment of the department.

### Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are outstanding.

- The newly appointed head of department provides strong leadership and a clear view about teaching and learning in English. She is a very good classroom practitioner and able to support other teachers well and exemplify good practice.
- The English team is cohesive and mostly consistent in its approach to issues such as teaching and behaviour management. They work closely together and share ideas and resources. There is good unity and a common sense of purpose. The department has a core of potentially very effective teachers. As a result, its capacity for further improvement is very good.
- The recent improvement in GCSE results is the result of clear and focused action. Expectations are high and the department is revising its Key Stage 3 curriculum to ensure that high standards are maintained. Self-evaluation is secure and there is a good understanding of areas for improvement, although the subject action plan should be more clearly focused on a smaller number of key priorities. The department is supported well by the school's senior leadership.
- The department monitors students' progress well and uses this to put appropriate interventions in place. The subject leader knows the department well and there is a great deal of informal discussion and monitoring. Lesson observations take place on a regular basis, although other strategies, such as work sampling and feedback from students, are not yet as well established as a way of evaluating provision.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- further improving the quality of teaching across the department by:
  - using consistently clear and effective learning objectives that contribute directly to students' progress
  - planning lessons to meet the needs of students of all abilities within the class
  - ensuring that all students are given enough time to learn fully from the teaching 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 the next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Philip Jarrett  
Her Majesty's Inspector