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Mrs J Tomkins
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Dear Mrs Tomkins

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 24 and 25 November 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 included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is outstanding.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is outstanding.

- Progress in English for all groups of students has been significantly better than the national average over the past four years. In 2008, the school was in the top 3% of comparable schools in this respect. Through systematic use of data, the department sets challenging targets and tracks the progress of individuals and groups meticulously.
- Historically, levels of attainment in English have been broadly in line with or slightly above the national average. Provisional results for 2009 indicate

a substantial improvement, with 77% gaining A* to C in English literature and 73% in English.

- The school's recent results for AS and A level in English language and literature and in English literature have been broadly in line with national averages and are improving.
- The number of students joining the school with English as an additional language, often partway through Key Stages 3 or 4, is very high. They make very good progress as a result of careful and frequent assessment and effective support given by specialists from the Hounslow Language Services and by well-trained teaching assistants in school. Over the past three years, their progress has been significantly better than in comparable schools nationally.
- Those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities benefit from well-directed support, including intensive teaching for those with poor literacy skills in Year 7.
- Students' personal development is strongly supported by the English department. The texts studied and concepts explored encourage students to reflect constructively on the challenges and benefits of living in a multi-cultural society. They are extremely committed and responsive learners. Good standards of literacy and well developed oral skills support their preparation for the workplace.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is outstanding.

- Among the strengths observed were teachers' secure subject knowledge and enthusiasm, well-structured planning, confident and well-judged use of technology, effective questioning skills and a very productive rapport with their students. Teachers made sure that students understood what was to be learnt and how, and helped them to evaluate their progress. On occasion, the drive to cover a great deal of material meant students did not have time to complete tasks, which made their learning less secure.
- Teaching assistants make a significant contribution to students' progress, for example, through targeted support for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Marking of written work is good, with praise balanced by clear and manageable guidance on how to improve.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The curriculum in English is outstanding.

- The curriculum is dynamic and engaging, being constantly reviewed and revised in response to changing expectations and requirements. Schemes of work show thorough coverage of National Curriculum content and skills,

with individual study units presenting opportunities for innovation and creativity.

- One-to-one coaching, small group teaching, booster classes and a variety of nationally accredited courses ensure that the potential and aspirations of all students are very successfully supported.
- Students develop a range of skills through working with primary school students, as story-tellers for example, and greatly appreciate off-site activities, such as theatre trips, poetry workshops and a recent project developed with the National Gallery. They participate very successfully in local and national debating and public speaking events.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are outstanding.

- The department is led exceptionally well. There is a persuasively articulated vision for its continuing development and the targets set are ambitious, based on a realistic evaluation of current strengths and areas of relative weakness. The success of recent initiatives to raise standards by enhancing teachers' skills and encouraging more active learning indicate outstanding capacity for further improvement.
- The quality of teaching and learning is systematically monitored by the head of department and senior managers. Strengths within the department are used very effectively to model best practice, support individuals and lead continuing professional development, not only within the English department but across the school.

Spelling and handwriting

The department has a detailed spelling policy that sets out the priorities and processes clearly. Strategies include identifying key words relevant to each unit, dictionary work, spelling tests and highlighting of spelling as part of reading. Teachers look out for patterns in students' misspellings so that links between errors can be tackled with individuals or small groups. There is no handwriting policy, other than insistence on legibility as a key factor in examination success. Learning support staff work with students whose 'home' script is very different from English, Arabic for example.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that teaching is consistent in balancing lively pace and extensive subject coverage with students' need for time to reflect on and complete tasks to a high standard.

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. 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

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector