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Mr N Charlton  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Charlton

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 9 and 10 December 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 eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is satisfactory.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is satisfactory.

- Attainment on entry to the school in English is average and students' attainment in GCSE English remains average. Recent examination results and current standards show that there has been some improvement. However, few students attain the highest grades.
- Students make satisfactory progress and there is an improving trend in GCSE results. Not all of the more able students achieve the very high grades of which they are capable.

- Attainment in the sixth form is average and students make satisfactory progress.
- Students in Years 7 and 8 have responded well to changes to the curriculum and methods of assessment. They enjoy English and have a good understanding of how to improve their performance. Older students are content with the subject but not as enthusiastic.

### Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory.

- In the best practice, clear learning objectives are shared with the students and referred to throughout the lessons.
- Teachers and their assistants provide good support for students of lower and middle ability, ensuring that tasks are tailored to their needs and provide sufficient challenge. In these lessons, group and paired work engage the students productively in their learning. However, the more able students are not catered for so specifically and so do not make as much progress in their learning.
- Teachers use questioning techniques well to test the students' understanding, but rarely ask more probing questions to extend their learning and encourage them to reflect on their progress.
- Good assessment enables students in all year groups to understand what they have learned and how to improve their standards. New assessment arrangement in Years 7 and 8 are having a positive impact on students' learning and motivation. Work is marked regularly and well. However, detailed and accurate assessment information is not always used to plan activities for particular groups in lessons.

### Quality of the curriculum in English

The curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- Recent improvements to the curriculum have made a significant difference to the quality of learning at Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4, the curriculum responds satisfactorily to the requirements of GCSE. An appropriate range of courses is provided in the sixth form.
- Provision to promote the enjoyment of a wide range of reading is not as strong as that for writing and speaking and listening. The students in Years 7 and 8 respond well to regular lessons spent in the school library, but there is insufficient provision for literature in other lessons or in activities outside the classroom.
- Although the curriculum meets statutory requirements, there are few opportunities for enriching the students' experience through trips or through working in school with authors and playwrights.

## Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are satisfactory.

- Subject leadership in English was identified as an area for improvement in the school's previous inspection in February 2008. The school has made good progress in successfully tackling this area. Subject leadership is satisfactory and continuing to improve.
- A sharper focus on raising achievement and improving assessment is beginning to accelerate the progress made by students. The department has a clearer sense of its strengths and weaknesses and, with the good support of the local authority, has improved the quality of strategic planning. The best examples of planning have challenging timescales, clear targets and good procedures for monitoring and evaluating progress. Not all of the department's planning is yet of this high quality. The department has not developed plans of sufficient rigour for meeting the particular needs of the more able.

## Spelling and handwriting

- In Years 7 and 8, students are given regular spelling tests linked to the meaning of words and their usage. Spelling lessons are enlivened by games and competitions to which the students respond positively. The department has well-conceived plans to extend this practice into other year groups.
- The department has identified that writing for a sustained period presents problems for a small minority of students and is considering how best to support them.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising the achievement of the more able students by:
  - ensuring that teachers' expectations consistently challenge them in all year groups
  - ensuring that lesson plans specifically target more able students
  - using a wider range of questioning techniques to challenge students to take their learning to a higher level
- improving the curriculum in English by:
  - reviewing the provision for reading
  - providing more opportunities for students to widen their experience of the subject outside lessons
- improving the quality of planning in the department, so that it is all of the same quality as that found in the plans for new initiatives written in collaboration with the local authority.

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

Andrew Harrett  
Her Majesty's Inspector