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Mr P Hamer
Principal
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Dear Mr Hamer

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 12 and 13 January 2010 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is good and improving.

- Students join the school with attainment which is broadly average. In 2009, by the end of Year 11, attainment was above average. Standards have improved annually as a result of the school's decision to pilot a new GCSE course. The proportion of students achieving A* and A grades at GCSE is well above average.
- Students make good progress from Year 7 to Year 11. In 2009, Year 11 students exceeded the challenging targets set for them. The school's assessment data show that all groups of students make good progress.
- There is good provision for those students who enter the school with special educational needs and/or disabilities, especially relating to literacy.

As a result, they make good progress and many catch up with their peers by the beginning of Year 8.

- In the lessons observed, students made generally good progress. They concentrated well, settled to work quickly and collaborated effectively in pairs or groups. Most enjoyed talking about their work and sharing their views but, in a third of the lessons observed, students lacked confidence orally.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- Teachers plan lessons well with clear objectives. They show good subject knowledge, especially in specialist units of the GCSE course.
- In the best lessons, teachers use probing questions to ensure that students extend and explain their views. However, in some lessons, tasks and questions were not always matched well enough to students' ability or needs to ensure that they achieved the different objectives set for them.
- Teachers use modern technology well to structure lessons and engage students' interest. Increasingly, students use a variety of technologies, such as film and computer applications, to present their work.
- Students know their target level or grade. Most understand what they need to do to achieve it. They value teachers' advice and comments on their assessed pieces of work. However, although teachers' marking of exercise books is regular it varies in quality with some providing too little guidance to students on how to improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The curriculum in English is good with outstanding features.

- Students enjoy the range of topics available in the pilot GCSE course which the school has implemented very successfully. They value the choice between units and the opportunity to combine units for different GCSE qualifications. They enjoy the more practical approaches linked to the study of modern media.
- The Key Stage 4 scheme of work is broad and has excellent coverage of media, modern communication, the moving image and spoken word as well as literature. It has proved effective in interesting and motivating students, especially boys. Students benefit from the opportunity to present work in a range of different media, blending analysis with creative work.
- The pilot GCSE course has successfully stimulated curriculum development and has contributed strongly to improving attainment. The Key Stage 3 scheme of work is now being revised using the framework of the GCSE course and ensuring appropriate progression.
- There is a good range of enrichment activities including an active 'scribbler's club' which promotes students as writers. Reading is promoted through regular and varied library-based lessons for Years 7 and 8. All

students engage in 15 minutes of reading each day, led by tutors. These sessions promote both individual and shared reading.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are good.

- The subject leader has a strong vision for the subject and has used curriculum development effectively to drive improvement. Expectations of staff and students are clear and focused on promoting enjoyment and raising standards. Staff work well together as a team. They plan collaboratively and share successful approaches and materials.
- The subject development plan is well focused with clear objectives. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is now very effective and the lessons learnt from its development are used in the ongoing review of the curriculum at Key Stage 3.
- The subject leader monitors performance regularly and evaluates progress. He knows the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. Students' progress is monitored very carefully. Examination results are analysed effectively to identify any areas for improvement.
- Attainment at Key Stage 4 has improved steadily over the last three years based on innovative curriculum development and increasingly effective teaching. There is good capacity to improve further as the successful aspects of the curriculum at Key Stage 4 are applied to Years 7, 8 and 9.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving teaching and learning further by ensuring that all teachers:
 - use questioning and a range of tasks to match work closely to students' attainment to challenge them appropriately
 - apply a variety of strategies in lessons to enable all students to be confident orally and to participate fully in discussion
 - take a consistent and constructive approach to marking and comment in students' exercise books.

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 available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Martin Cragg
Her Majesty's Inspector