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Mr J Summerfield
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Summerfield

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 24 and 25 February 2010, 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 provision for gifted and talented students 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, observation of seven lessons and short visits to two further lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is outstanding.

- GCSE results show that attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is significantly above the national average. Work seen in the current Year 11 and the school's predictions for these students' examination results indicate that attainment remains high.
- The great majority of pupils make good progress. Taken overall, students' progress, from entering the school at an above average standard to the end of Year 11, is better than the national average.
- Students make good progress in the sixth form.

- Throughout the school, for the vast majority of students, successful learning is underpinned by their mature attitudes, excellent behaviour and high degree of commitment to achievement and by the outstanding personal support they receive from staff. However, the behaviour of a small minority of students who have low attainment, accompanied by behavioural difficulties, undermines the effectiveness of teaching and their learning.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- The bulk of the teaching observed was of a good quality and the progress students make confirms that teaching is good.
- There are some common strengths in the good teaching. Relationships between teachers and students are very positive. Teachers use question and answer sessions well to develop students' thinking. This was seen, for instance, in relation to analysis and interpretation of poetry and consideration of how writers develop characters. Teachers guide purposeful discussion among students. Homework is linked closely to classroom learning.
- The teaching is at its best when teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve and draw skilfully on their very good subject knowledge to deepen students' understanding, for example, of how writers use language to achieve specific effects.
- The use of day-to-day assessment, marking of students' work, setting of short-term targets for students and monitoring of their progress are not consistent across the department. Students say they value constructive, in-depth criticism of their work because it helps them understand how to improve. Feedback of this quality is seen more often for the older and more able students.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The curriculum in English is good.

- The English curriculum covers all that is required and is secured by thoroughly planned schemes of work. This ensures that students follow a balanced and progressive programme and all teaching groups in the same year cover essentially the same ground.
- The school offers a range of enrichment activities beyond lessons, such as theatre visits and clubs for drama and poetry. Students have opportunities to enter competitions, for example for writing and public speaking, and have been successful in them.
- In recent years the school has changed examination boards for GCSE. This timescale has paralleled the improvements in students' achievement.
- There is a good range of intervention and support for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those at risk of underachieving. In the main, these succeed in accelerating progress.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are good.

- The significant improvements in students' attainment and progress, in the last two years, confirm the effectiveness of subject leadership and management. These improvements have been secured despite staff changes during the year.
- Senior staff keep a watching brief on the provision in English and the subject leader has sound plans for further improvement.

Provision for gifted and talented students in English

- The school has clear policies and procedures for identifying students who may be gifted or talented in English. A range of additional enrichment activities is provided for gifted and talented students and these are greatly enjoyed.
- For the most part, lessons for the higher attaining sets provide sufficient challenge for the most able. In lessons with top sets, there is, at times, an impressive sense of a shared search, by students and teacher, for deeper understanding of the texts studied. Nonetheless, marking of these students' work does not always indicate how they might do better.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the consistency and effectiveness of the use of assessment, marking, target-setting, and monitoring of students' progress, to maximise students' achievement
- ensuring that, for all lower attaining students, teaching and the curriculum are more effectively matched to their needs.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop English in the school.

As I explained previously, 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

Pat Kime
Her Majesty's Inspector