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Dear Mr Winston

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 27 and 28 January 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 (GT) 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 eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is outstanding.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is outstanding.

- Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 have been broadly average in recent years. However, the trend is upward and in 2009 results were above average with over 80% of students achieving A* to C grades in GCSE courses.
- The progress made by students in English is excellent. Performance data show that progress has improved over the past three years and that in 2009 students achieved in the top 2% nationally. The department

exceeded the challenging targets set last year and evidence suggests that this will also be the case in 2010.

- Unlike the national picture, boys achieve as well as girls in English because the curriculum motivates and challenges them. Most groups of students achieve very well including White British and Black Caribbean students as well as most of those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The progress of more able students has been less substantial.
- Students are very well behaved and extremely positive about English. They are keen to do well and take their work seriously. Many make especially good progress in speaking and listening.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is outstanding.

- Students all speak very highly of their English lessons. They comment on their teachers' dedication and support. As one student put it, 'they give 150%!'
- Teaching observed was good overall with some outstanding features. Relationships were very strong. Teachers employed a variety of lively activities that motivated students. Lessons focused imaginatively on speaking and listening, and group work was planned exceptionally well and very effective. Self- and peer-assessment skills were very well taught. At times, some teachers missed opportunities to assess students' learning at key moments in lessons.
- Assessment is very good. Marking is consistent in giving a thoughtful, personal response to students' work and identifying areas for improvement. Students are set individual targets in reading, writing, speaking and listening and these are revised and updated in the light of the progress made by students. This approach works well and students know how to improve work.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The curriculum in English is outstanding.

- The curriculum motivates all students and helps them to make very good progress. It is personalised well at Key Stage 4 to provide different routes through a range of GCSE courses.
- There are some particular strengths to the department's Key Stage 3 curriculum. It is broad and builds in continuity and progression. Work in English reaches beyond school in finding contexts and audiences for students' learning and this makes the subject relevant to the students' experience. Information and communication technology is a key part of the English curriculum through studying and making films and, for example, the unit on analysing and producing a website. Teachers make good use of challenging texts from a range of cultures. Grammar, spelling and punctuation are built clearly into starter activities in lessons.

- Teachers encourage reading outside school by recommending books or lending their own to students. A stronger and more systematic promotion of independent reading is planned once the new library opens.
- Enrichment activities contribute substantially to the impact of the curriculum in English. A wide range of extra-curricular activities is available and students speak enthusiastically about them. This excellent provision includes: Debate Mate, book clubs for boys and girls, a school newspaper and a radio broadcasting club. In addition, students are frequently taken to see plays and films, and other opportunities are provided to work within the community, for example, in producing a tourist leaflet for the borough.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are outstanding.

- The subject leader provides a very clear sense of direction to work in English and this is reflected in the strengths of the curriculum and teaching identified above. She is supported well by two enthusiastic key stage coordinators who monitor the progress of students successfully.
- This strong leadership team is further supported by a dedicated group of teachers who work well together and share ideas. This creates a strong common sense of purpose and a consistency of practice in English.
- Monitoring and evaluation are very thorough. Underachievement is picked up by detailed monitoring of performance and interventions are well planned and effective. Lesson observations and the regular 'Book look' are very effective in monitoring the impact of teaching and feeding back issues for improvement across the subject team.
- As a result, self-evaluation in English is secure. There is a strong focus on continuing to improve the quality of teaching. There is a good subject action plan. However, although the department recognises that the progress of the more able students is a key priority, it does not feature sufficiently in the action plan.

Provision for gifted and talented students (GT) in English

GT students enjoy English and consider that lessons are suitably demanding. The department provides clear guidance for staff on identifying and teaching these students. Fast-track options for GCSE enable more able students to take three GCSEs in English. Teachers challenge GT students well in oral work through allocating particular roles as 'expert' or chairing discussions. Good support is provided for these students through the extensive enrichment programme. As a result, aspirations of GT students are high.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- identifying within the subject action plan effective strategies for improving the progress of the more able students.

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 published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Philip Jarrett
Her Majesty's Inspector