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Miss M Regan  
Principal  
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Dear Miss Regan

Ofsted 2010-11 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 April 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, a governor and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is outstanding.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is outstanding.

- Students make good progress to reach high standards in GCSE English and English Literature. Their enthusiasm for the subject is strong.
- Attainment at Advanced level is in line with the national average. The numbers of students taking A-level English Language and English Literature are rising, and so are results.
- The use of assessment to set high challenge for all students has contributed to a significant improvement in the progress made across the age and ability range over the past two years. In particular, the proportion of A and A\* grades has increased.
- Boys make even better progress than girls, because they enjoy the lively and relevant curriculum.

- There are no differences in the achievement of identified groups. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make at least good progress, because the college provides effective support for individuals.

### Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- The English team includes a substantial core of outstanding practitioners. They set high expectations on the basis of detailed understanding of each individual's attainment. These translate into well-focused teaching plans with clear objectives.
- Lessons are interesting and thought provoking for students because tasks are imaginative, varied and well paced. Some excellent modelling and probing questioning was observed. Teachers make effective interactive use of new technology and provide good opportunities for students to learn independently, including through thoughtfully planned homework. These qualities have a very productive impact on the gifted and talented students.
- A minority of teaching observed was less sharply focused. Students were not always asked sufficiently open and penetrating questions to help them explore a text, and teachers did not exploit students' ideas fully.
- Teachers' use of assessment is a consistent strength. The department has made good use of National Strategy guidance on assessing pupils' progress to pitch teaching appropriately and this has had a positive impact on attainment. Students benefit from thorough marking and understand what they need to do next.
- Relationships are strong and extra help is readily available. Students understand their regular feedback and feel well supported to achieve their high aspirations.

### Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is outstanding.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum has been extensively overhauled to make it relevant, interesting and more challenging. Themes are explored through lively discussions, dramatic exploration of stimulating texts and imaginative speaking and writing assignments which give students scope to be creative and independent.
- The scheme of work is progressive and interconnects the skills of reading, writing and speaking and listening well. Plans feature moving image texts and digital communication as well as classic literature, reflecting the diverse interests of the talented team and good links with other subjects.
- Similar approaches sustain older students' interests and explain the increasing take-up of English Literature, English Language, Theatre and Media Studies courses by post-16 students.

- Students have taken part in literary conferences, debates and drama productions. Some shadow the Carnegie Book Award or produce a digital newsletter. Writing competitions have fostered the creativity and enthusiasm of many students, including the gifted and talented.

### Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are outstanding.

- Achievement continues to improve as a result of determined and ably led action.
- Senior leaders have fully supported two new curriculum leaders in developing an inspiring curriculum and more effectively focused teaching.
- The curriculum leaders' clear vision, infectious enthusiasm and whole-hearted dedication motivate both students and their colleagues. Despite changes in the teaching team, students say they have been consistently well supported to sustain their strong progress.
- Subject self-evaluation is rigorous and leads to prompt action on clearly identified areas of weakness. Leaders model, support and monitor the high-quality work they expect, with good effect on their colleagues' professional development.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- continuing to work on the areas for further improvement already identified in the department's clear and ambitious plan.

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

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website under the URN for your college. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Susan Bowles  
Her Majesty's Inspector