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24 June 2010

Miss P Pocock
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Pocock

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 14 and 15 June 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 without their consent.

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

The overall effectiveness of English is outstanding.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is outstanding.

- Students join the school with a very wide range of attainment. Overall, in line with the school's admissions criteria, attainment is low in comparison to the national average. However, all Year 11 and sixth-form students gain accreditation at some level up to GCSE and BTEC.
- Students' performance is assessed regularly and the school's analysis of this information indicates that the majority make outstanding progress from their starting points. The school is beginning to compare its performance against that of other similar schools.
- The school closely monitors the progress of individuals and specific groups. Most groups make at least good progress. Specific strategies are in place to tackle any issues, for example to accelerate girls' reading.

- In the lessons observed, students concentrated well and showed enjoyment in their learning. They collaborated well and supported each other. They shared ideas and tried hard to answer teachers' questions, giving explanations when prompted. Many were keen to read aloud and to record key points in writing, often without teachers' guidance.
- Students' self-confidence, awareness of others, social and communication skills are developed extremely well.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is outstanding.

- The exceptionally positive relationships and clear expectations in classes give students the confidence to participate and make learning enjoyable.
- Lesson planning is very detailed and activities are very well matched to students' needs, taking into account the wide range of capabilities. Teachers set high expectations for all students and make clear what is expected in terms of attitude, concentration and learning.
- Teachers use questions very effectively to develop students' understanding, to consolidate their learning and to encourage response. Students participate in oral activities enthusiastically and use a variety of cues to help them frame answers.
- Adults model learning and tasks very effectively using a wide range of resources, including very good use of the interactive whiteboards to help students understand exactly what they need to do to be successful.
- Students understand their targets and can explain what they are working to improve. Teachers use checklists and key criteria to help students understand what they need to achieve. There are very detailed systems for assessing students' performance and progress, covering a wide range of responses by students, especially where their communication skills are limited.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is outstanding.

- The curriculum is broad and covers all the aspects required by the National Curriculum, including study of classic literature, poetry, a range of non-fiction texts and media. In the sixth form, literacy and communication skills are very well integrated into broader topics. The subject leader is developing the reinforcement and application of literacy skills in other subjects across the curriculum.
- Teachers take great care to ensure that this broad curriculum is matched closely to students' varying needs and capabilities. Modern communication methods and computers are used very effectively to engage students' interest, bring the curriculum to life and to model successful approaches to work, for example in the use of students' draft film trailer.

- Schemes of work are very detailed with comprehensive lesson plans, supported by a very wide range of resources, including use of computers. There is helpful guidance on how topics can be adapted to cater for students who require multi-sensory stimulation and whose responses are more limited.
- There are excellent opportunities for students to learn through trips, events, activities and clubs, such as to Stratford, the Globe theatre, poetry competitions, school drama productions and drama club.
- Students benefit greatly from excellent individual and small group support from adults, including regular detailed assessment of their progress.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are outstanding.

- The subject leader has a very clear vision for English and is strongly committed to ensuring that students have full access to a broad and stimulating curriculum. With staff, she sets high expectations for what students can access and enjoy, and what they can learn.
- Regular training and support ensures that teachers' skills are developed and kept up to date, for example in supporting students with specific literacy difficulties and using the latest computer applications.
- The subject leader has devised detailed action plans based on a thorough evaluation of students' achievement, the results of student surveys and a review of the curriculum. This highlighted slower progress for girls in reading which was tackled successfully by using girl-friendly materials including magazines, karaoke games and providing a 'girls only' reading session.
- The subject leader regularly reviews students' progress and knows the subject's strengths and areas for development. There is a constant emphasis on improvement.
- English is a successful and popular subject which continues to improve through curriculum review, updated resources, wider use of modern technology and extension of accreditation.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- further extending the teaching and application of literacy skills through subjects across the curriculum.

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 under the URN for your school. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Martin Cragg
Her Majesty's Inspector