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Ms C Gillen  
Headteacher  
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Dear Ms Gillen

### **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 March 2011 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 eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

### **Achievement in English**

Achievement in English is satisfactory and improving.

- Attainment in GCSE English and English Literature has been below average but is rising steadily, despite a dip in 2010. Students in general make good progress from below average starting points, and no groups, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, underachieve. However, few students reach the highest grades.
- The school is acting effectively to improve achievement. The majority of the current Years 10 and 11 are on track to reach suitably challenging targets. Increasingly rigorous assessment by teachers indicates that the students' progress in Key Stage 3 is accelerating this year because of improvements made to provision.
- The quality of learning is at least satisfactory and sometimes good. Most students understand what they need to do to make progress, participate

well when lessons are active, and work independently with concentration. However, students sometimes show a lack of confidence in collaborating to solve problems for themselves. A considerable number find it difficult to write clearly and fluently.

- To date, boys have made stronger progress in English than girls. Imaginative adjustments to the curriculum and teaching approaches are improving the quality of learning for girls.
- Students spoken to say that they enjoy most English lessons because teaching is energising, texts and topics are relevant and teachers give them clear advice on how to do better. Younger students are very positive, reflecting the more lively Key Stage 3 curriculum. They respond very well to their teachers' enthusiasm for literature and engaging activities, such as role play, creative writing and making presentations to the class. Appealing books have encouraged interest in independent reading.

### **Quality of teaching in English**

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- Good qualities include teachers' knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject, their understanding of students' strengths and needs, and positive relationships. Good progress was seen when teachers set and clearly explained suitably high expectations and managed practical activities well, so that all students were engaged. Effective modelling and resources guided students through the writing process and feedback was constructive. Students were able to see how they had improved.
- Some teaching did not lead learning with such clarity and pace. Tasks were not always succinctly explained, so it took longer for students to settle to independent work or to move on to higher challenges. Questioning did not always deepen understanding and feedback was less precise.

### **Quality of the curriculum in English**

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- The curriculum has recently been redesigned to ensure more interest and higher expectations for students. Careful planning for progression is helping to raise attainment in Key Stage 3 and prepare students better for GCSE.
- A generic course linking English to the humanities subjects has been designed for the substantial group of students in Year 7 who start with below-average skills in literacy. Smaller classes and catch-up sessions have been introduced for some Key Stage 4 students. Regular assessments carefully monitor the impact of these adaptations.
- Students of all ages and abilities respond positively to the good range of texts they encounter, because most teachers make reading an enjoyable and lively activity, involving good opportunities for role play and debate.

Writing is well linked to reading, relevant to life outside school and gives scope for individual choice.

- Year 7 students spoken to were particularly positive about English. One described how teachers 'entice and involve' them in reading novels and poems, recommending books to them personally.
- The library is helping boost interest in reading. Student librarians create topical displays reflecting students' interests and there are welcoming activities such as the 'Brew and Book' club. Other enjoyed enrichments include visits from authors and to the theatre.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in English**

Leadership and management in English are good.

- The subject leader has a clear and well-informed vision for English and leads a team strongly committed to improving outcomes for all students.
- Senior and subject leaders and managers have good understanding of the factors affecting learning in English and how to improve provision. The action plan is well focused and, despite some staffing instability, is promoting more effective teaching. The trends in students' attainment, progress and attitudes indicate good capacity to improve.
- English teachers are highly regarded for their contribution to the whole-school drive to improve literacy through more effective teaching. The good curriculum reflects the talents of the team, which meets regularly to review, plan and share good practice.
- Teachers are well supported, with helpful guidance from the subject leader and opportunities to observe others. As a result, there is growing understanding of agreed approaches across the team. However, there remains some variation in the effectiveness with which teachers lead learning.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- raising attainment in English, by improving the consistency of teaching through embedding good practice in leading learning.

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

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Susan Bowles**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**