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Miss C Lennon
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Lennon

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 10 and 11 May 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 10 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is outstanding.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is outstanding.

- Results in GCSE English are broadly in line with average at the end of Key Stage 4. Results are better than average in GCSE English Literature, where the department enters nearly all students for the examination. The proportion of students achieving the higher grades A or A* is above average in both courses.
- Contextual value-added data suggest that the progress of students is at least good in English, placing the school in the top 25% nationally over the past two years. Progress in the English Literature course is even better and, for some students, it is outstanding. Most groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, achieve equally well. Boys make as much progress in English as girls.
- English is very popular in the sixth form and nearly half of all students take at least one English course. Attainment is above average overall

across all English courses in the sixth form and this represents outstanding progress by students.

- Progress in lessons observed was good. In the most effective lessons, students were mature, thoughtful and very keen to do well. Where younger students were not fully engaged by lessons, there was some evidence of lack of concentration and interest.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- Teaching in lessons observed was good overall. Relationships are mostly positive and students are engaged by a range of lively activities. Group work is well taught and students are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning. Writing is taught very effectively through good modelling by teachers and a systematic approach to drafting and revising. Good subject knowledge and an enthusiastic approach contribute to effective learning, including in the sixth form where high levels of performance are the result of outstanding teaching overall.
- In less effective lessons observed, the pace of learning was sometimes too fast, leaving students too little time to reflect or consolidate what they had learnt. In these lessons, teachers sometimes missed opportunities to intervene and check students' understanding before moving on to the next activity.
- Most students enjoy English. They praise their teachers' approachability and enthusiasm, the variety in lessons, and the creative approaches. Some students suggested that they lost interest where topics in English continued too long or where there were too few opportunities for more creative responses.
- The department has a very clear and consistent approach to marking and feedback. Assessed pieces are marked in considerable detail and include an effective analysis of strengths and weaknesses with clear targets for improvement. However, students do not always remember their targets or understand how to address them in the next piece of work. Students would sometimes like feedback on the more informal pieces of writing that they complete in their exercise books.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- The curriculum is well planned at all key stages. There is clear guidance for teachers but with flexibility to modify the published departmental units. This provides a common entitlement for all students and is differentiated well by teachers, with especially good levels of challenge for high-achieving students. Assessment is integrated effectively within schemes of work.
- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is thoughtfully constructed and original. It contains a number of innovative features including language study and

units that appeal directly to boys. It helps students to develop the skills required for GCSE study.

- Some very good links with primary feeder schools involve joint planning and teaching, and are focused around the aim of raising standards of literacy and extending coherent approaches across all the schools in the Brigshaw Trust.
- Some gaps currently in the curriculum at Key Stage 3 include the promotion of reading for pleasure, teaching spelling, and opportunities to use information and communication technology and media technology within English lessons. There is considerable emphasis at present on developing students' analytical skills but too few opportunities for creative or personal responses to texts.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is outstanding.

- Subject leaders provide very good direction to the work of the department. A clear vision guides their work, based on principles such as equality of provision for all students, students learning from each other, and developing independence.
- Subject leaders and teachers are passionate, committed and hard-working. The team works very well together. Planning is collaborative and there are many opportunities for discussion and sharing best practice. Less experienced teachers are well supported but also able to contribute to the development of policies. There is good delegation.
- The English team receives very good support from senior leaders who share its commitment to high achievement in English.
- There is very good monitoring of students' progress and effective intervention for targeted students. The department reviews its strengths and weaknesses regularly and well, making good use of focus weeks, regular lesson observations and moderation meetings. This contributes to accurate self-evaluation and an effective action plan.
- The English team is reflective, open to change, and keen to improve provision further. The capacity for further improvement is very good.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that lessons focus more consistently on outcomes for students and provide opportunities for reflection and consolidation of understanding
- reviewing the Key Stage 3 curriculum to fill current subject gaps and to ensure the appropriate balance of analytical and creative work in English.

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

Philip Jarrett
Her Majesty's Inspector