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Mr J Bradshaw
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Dear Mr Bradshaw

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 5 and 6 July 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 12 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is satisfactory.

- Attainment has risen at the end of Key Stage 4 over recent years but remains low. The gap between girls' and boys' attainment is broadly in line with the average. Few students achieve A* or A grades although results are in line with students' prior attainment.
- However, formal assessments already completed, such as the GCSE coursework submitted in Year 11 and the results of controlled conditions assessments in Year 10, suggest that attainment is currently considerably higher across Key Stage 4 and likely to be closer to the national average.
- Progress over recent years has been variable, with weaker performance in 2010 and 2011. Boys do not make as much progress as girls and the school has also identified White British students as the lowest achieving group. Effective, targeted action has been taken and this is partly reflected in the good progress being made by students in Year 10 and 11.

Attainment on entry to the school is below average, with particularly low standards in writing. Given that half the students have a first language other than English, many make good progress to achieve two A* to C grades in English by the end of Year 11.

- Attitudes to learning are very good. Students are keen to do well and show good concentration and perseverance. They work supportively together in small groups. When given opportunities to discuss issues in class, many students show high levels of confidence and express ideas well.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory.

- There is some variability in the quality of teaching across the department. Strengths of lessons observed include: very good relationships and management of behaviour; effective use of resources and interactive tasks; good use of assessment criteria; and good provision of clear audiences and purposes for writing. In several lessons, teachers provided effective, additional support for less able students or extra challenge for the more academic students. Approaches to differentiation were not always as effective in other lessons, sometimes leaving more able students insufficiently challenged.
- Lessons were always pacy and lively. However, at times, teachers did not allow students enough time to complete tasks and opportunities were missed to consolidate learning before moving on to the next activity. Learning objectives were clear and realistic in many of the lessons observed but too broad in others. Teachers were effective at using praise to encourage students, although there were times when teachers too easily accepted what students said or wrote, missing the opportunity to expect more from some students.
- Students enjoy lessons, especially at Key Stage 4. They appreciate the help provided both within lessons and beyond. They like the variety in English but would like more opportunities for creative work.
- The quality of assessment is variable and approaches to marking, curricular target-setting and feedback are not yet consistent enough. The best marking is of high quality combining detailed feedback with helpful areas for improvement. As a result, many students have a clear idea about the next steps in their learning. Some marking is less helpful or explicit. Spelling mistakes are rarely corrected and there is too little emphasis on ensuring that students follow up issues identified in marking.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- The curriculum is well planned across both key stages, with a good balance of flexibility and prescription. Assessment has been integrated effectively.

- There has been a thoughtful review of the Key Stage 3 curriculum to emphasise exploratory ways of working, the better use of contemporary texts and technology, and a focus on providing 'real' contexts for students' work. This is well designed to increase the engagement of underachieving groups of students.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. There is good emphasis on the use of technology, including computers and moving image texts, as well as opportunities to engage students through drama and talk. Reading for pleasure has been promoted through the successful introduction of an individual reading programme in Year 8.
- The school operates a good programme of intervention including reading recovery, one-to-one tuition, tutorial support, and the use of students as Literacy Leaders to support reading. These initiatives are well evaluated and mostly effective. Regular study support is aimed particularly at GCSE students. The department provides a number of enrichment opportunities. These consist of regular events including the film club as well as some innovative one-off events such as a poetry visit to the National Gallery. The department accepts that the programme should be expanded to enable more students to be involved in English activities.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is good.

- There has been considerable emphasis at a senior level over the past year on improving teaching and progress for students. This appears to be reflected in higher standards at Key Stage 4. Senior leaders provide good support and challenge for English, as well as for literacy across the school.
- The department is well led. The curriculum is built on clear principles including a commitment to equality and the importance of good-quality literature. The department's work has a strong sense of direction. Teachers work well together and with good collaboration and sharing of practice. A strong core of effective teaching is at the heart of the department. The capacity for further improvement is good.
- Self-evaluation is secure and accurate. It is based in part on detailed analysis of performance data to identify underperforming students. Evidence from lesson observations, work scrutiny and feedback from students enable the department to have a very clear idea of its strengths, weaknesses and priorities for development.
- The department has a high profile within the school and has been actively involved in assessment, literacy and other wider developments. Links with the local authority and other schools are good.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the proportion of lessons that are good or outstanding by:
 - improving the clarity of learning objectives to enhance students' progress within individual lessons

- making use of existing good practice to improve planning for differentiation in lessons
- having higher expectations of students' capabilities in both written and oral work
- ensuring that students have enough time in lessons to complete work and consolidate 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

Philip Jarrett
Her Majesty's Inspector