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Mr J Allin
Principal
The King's Church of England School
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Dear Mr Allin

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 28 and 29 September 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 satisfactory.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is satisfactory and improving.

- The decline in attainment in GCSE English Language at the end of Key Stage 4 was reversed in 2011 and attainment is now average. Fewer students than average gain A* and A grades. In 2011, half the students took GCSE English Literature. Results were well above average although the national average figure is based on a higher proportion of entries.
- Students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make satisfactory progress. In 2011, the trend of declining progress was reversed. Year 11 students made good progress compared with schools in similar contexts and rates of progress were closer to the national average. Progress has been slower at Key Stage 3 than Key Stage 4.

- In the sixth form in 2009 and 2010, students taking AS level made inadequate progress and those that continued to A level made broadly satisfactory progress. In 2011, students made improved progress at AS level. The school has recently provided new staffing for the sixth form.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory.

- The majority of teaching is good or better. Some is outstanding and some is satisfactory. The best teaching observed was enthusiastic, challenged students' thinking and promoted their independence. Questions were used well and expert commentary deepened understanding. Activities were well-structured and fun. Quick quizzes and games activated students' use of language and extended their learning. These features were observed more often in higher ability than lower ability groups.
- Where teaching was satisfactory, students were not sufficiently excited by the learning. They carried out the task but they did not develop their personal response. Sometimes the objective was not sufficiently practical and did not challenge them to improve a specific skill. Occasionally, the lesson did not provide enough short, structured opportunities for students to express themselves in speech or writing.
- Students are well informed about how well they are doing and how to improve. At Key Stage 4, students do not always have sufficient access to the teacher's written comments on the formal assessments of their learning. At Key Stage 3, students receive positive and constructive feedback. Formal assessment is used to record progress but is not always used sufficiently well to develop a dialogue with students, to inform the planning of teaching or to tackle any underachievement.
- Until recently, sixth-form students lacked sufficient guidance on essay writing, examination technique and how to attain higher grades. As a result of new leadership and teaching, this has been rectified. Students appreciate the greater variety of learning activity and the more effective guidance.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- The Key Stage 4 curriculum has been revised effectively. Programmes of additional support and early entry GCSE helped to accelerate the progress of students in Year 11. Until recently, Key Stage 3 schemes of work provided outline guidance but lacked detail and structure. New units of work have been introduced with a stronger emphasis on skills and their assessment. The promotion of creative writing and independent project work is a growing strength of the curriculum.
- Strategies for promoting literacy across the school and reading for pleasure are underdeveloped. Enrichment activities include opportunities for students to work with authors. Sixth form enrichment opportunities are underdeveloped.

- In the sixth form, the challenge of providing engaging teaching and learning in one block of four lessons for a whole morning has not been consistently successful.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is good.

- The impact of decisive action by senior leaders is demonstrated in the improved GCSE results in 2011. Effective use of external evaluation and extensive lesson observation informed the analysis of strengths and weaknesses. In-service training and coaching have led to improved teaching. The use of newly qualified teachers on long-term contracts has helped with continuity of teaching and learning.
- An assistant principal has recently taken up post to lead the department. She is ambitious and has an accurate understanding of what needs to be done. Data and examinations have been analysed carefully. She has quickly and accurately identified priorities for further improvement. Well-defined plans have begun to be implemented. Team members are keen to make a contribution and have been delegated new responsibilities. New staff are well-supported and are making an effective contribution to the work of the department.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the quality and consistency of teaching, assessment and the curriculum to accelerate the progress made by students at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form.

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

As 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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Bernard Campbell
Her Majesty's Inspector