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Mr N McWilliams  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr McWilliams

### **Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: English**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 29 February and 1 March 2012 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 seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is satisfactory.

### **Achievement in English**

Achievement in English is satisfactory.

- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 has been inadequate in the past, with a declining trend over recent years. At the end of 2011, only 51% of students achieved grades A\* to C in English language, although the percentage achieving this in English literature, on a reduced entry, was above the national average. Value-added measures also indicate that, up to the end of 2011, students' progress was significantly below average. However, achievement since September has improved significantly. This is still not fully embedded, but inspection evidence confirms the school's own evaluation that the school is securely on track to exceed its own challenging target of 72% achieving grades A\* to C and 71% making three levels of progress.

- Students start at the school in Year 7 with attainment in English that is well below average. Although progress in Key Stage 3 has been slow in the past, the introduction of more focused interventions to support those who are underachieving is having a very positive impact and achievement is steadily improving across Key Stages 3 and 4. Standards across the school are particularly high in speaking and listening, but students' enthusiasm for reading and poetry varies. Overall, their enjoyment of English is steadily improving, although the school's own analysis of student questionnaires indicates that more needs to be done to improve attitudes.

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

The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory.

- Teaching is satisfactory overall and rapidly improving; the school's own monitoring records accurately reflect inspection evidence that the percentage of good or better lessons is increasing, but that some weaker practice remains. Lessons are well planned to take account of the varying abilities of students and the best teaching is characterised by the flexible way in which planning is adjusted to meet the emerging needs of students.
- Links to other subjects are used well to enhance students' understanding of set texts. For example, in one class students were gaining in-depth contextual understanding of the Great Depression in preparation for their reading of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. Behaviour is very well managed and imaginative tasks successfully motivate students to engage with their learning. Teachers' questioning provides effective challenges to students to extend and reflect widely on their learning. They respond well to this and, as a result, express themselves clearly and confidently.
- Where teaching is less effective, activities are mismatched to students' needs. In a few instances, insufficient time is allowed for specific activities which impacts on the quality of students' work. Occasionally, questioning is not incisive enough in probing students' understanding or in extending their learning.
- Although assessments are accurate, the quality of marking varies. A consistent strength is the way in which self- and peer-assessment are used to support learning. Targets are constantly referred to in lessons and link well to National Curriculum levels or examination criteria so that students have a good understanding of what they need to aim for. However, marking does not always provide sufficient guidance on how weaknesses can be improved and poor standards of presentation in students' books often go unchallenged.

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

The quality of the curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- The schemes of work are well planned to provide a good balance between reading, writing, speaking and listening. Units have been carefully designed to cover a suitable range of topics with texts covering modern

and classic literature and poetry. However, the development of students' wider reading is underdeveloped and this has been hampered by the lack of a school library in the past. The school is aware of this issue and a new library is due to open in a few weeks' time.

- The curriculum provides opportunities to enhance students' experiences in English, but the range of enrichment activities is currently underdeveloped. Suitable plans are in place to address this, and a good start has been made to ensure that all students have a minimum entitlement to, for example, live theatre.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is good.

- The newly appointed head of department, strongly supported by senior staff and the English department as a whole, has made an excellent start in addressing a history of underachievement. Her drive and ambition are starting to have a very positive impact and the department works as a highly committed and collegiate team. As a result, Students' attitudes towards English and their achievement are improving rapidly.
- The recent appointment of a literacy coordinator and the implementation of a comprehensive intervention plan demonstrate the school's determination to raise standards of literacy across the curriculum. This is a very promising development, but is at an early stage.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and based on a rigorous analysis of assessment data and monitoring of teaching and learning. This is informing improvement planning which identifies suitable priorities, sets challenging targets and details well-conceived actions to address them.

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

- ensuring that teachers' marking provides consistently clear guidance on how students can improve their work
- improving opportunities for students to develop more positive attitudes towards, and wider interest in, books and poetry
- embedding plans to ensure a wider curriculum enrichment programme.

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

**Chris Nye**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**