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Mr M Blackman  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Blackman

### **Ofsted 2012–13 subject survey inspection programme: English**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 9 and 10 May 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 good.

### **Achievement in English**

Achievement in English is good.

- By the end of Year 11, students' attainment is broadly average with girls attaining higher than boys. Given the wide range of starting points, different groups of students make good progress. There has been a marked improvement in the last two academic years, with achievement in 2011 being substantially better than in 2010. Students in the sixth form are currently also making good progress, with much less variation between Years 12 and 13 than was the case previously.
- Students achieve equally well in reading, writing, speaking and listening. They are confident to contribute to lessons. Across the ability range, students are particularly adept at analysing different types of texts. Boys' handwriting, presentation and technical accuracy, as well as the less enthusiastic attitudes of some older boys, present barriers to higher attainment. As a result, the school has identified students' application of

literacy skills across the curriculum, and particularly how well boys apply these, as a priority for development.

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

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- Most groups of students are positive about teaching. Teachers plan lessons that promote active engagement and many of these activities stimulate thinking and encourage students to learn from each other. Resources are used well, including the well-received Key Stage 3 Student's Handbook, to develop skills and an appreciation of English. The strong emphasis on self-reflection and building confidence promote students' increasingly good spiritual and social development. There is good and sometimes excellent diagnostic marking of students' written work in each key stage.
- The main weakness in teaching observed was that planning and classroom practice did not ensure consistently effective approaches to matching learning to the needs of students of all abilities. In addition, there were missed opportunities for all the available learning time to be maximised. On occasions, the pace of learning was not brisk enough and this resulted in students being overly passive, slow to get started or not learning quickly.

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

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- The curriculum is broadly balanced and ensures good development of, and progression in, a range of skills with particular strengths in Key Stage 3. Leaders make adaptations to the curriculum, where appropriate, such as to ensure that the analysis of moving image texts is catered for well or to plan more opportunities to engage boys.
- There are good opportunities, very well supported by the school's librarian, to promote wider and independent reading such as in the fortnightly Key Stage 3 reading lessons. The school's annual high profile 'World Book Week' involves all year groups and subjects across the curriculum and makes a significant contribution to wider reading.
- An increased focus on students' technical accuracy is evident in regular skills-based lessons. Students with low literacy levels are supported by the school's Raising Achievement department although this is not always well linked to the mainstream Year 7 English curriculum. Opportunities to enjoy live theatre and have first-hand experience of working with authors are available to all students. Those who are particularly gifted and talented and those with a passion for the subject experience a wide range of enrichment activities, including regional and national competitions.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is good.

- There has been a significant and sustained increase in students' achievement. Leaders are well aware, as a result of accurate self-evaluation, that there is more to do and know how this will be achieved. Improvement planning is currently being revised in line with changes at whole-school level and inspection evidence endorses these changes. Capacity for further improvement is clear.
- There is a good team approach to leading and developing the department. The subject leader is supported well by the deputy headteacher, the assistant subject leader and the range of experience and expertise that exists in the department. There is general consistency of approach across the staff and teachers share the subject leader's passion for the subject. This is seen in the desire for students to appreciate English language and literature as well as succeed in examinations. Effective collaborative working includes the development of the curriculum and the sharing of good practice.

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

- raising attainment of boys by:
  - ensuring further development of basic literacy skills, particularly in technical accuracy, and the wider application of these skills across all subjects
  - ensuring that the English curriculum and taught lessons engage all boys
- improving the quality of teaching so that more is outstanding by:
  - increasing the effectiveness of planning strategies to meet the needs of students of all abilities
  - ensuring that the pace of learning is sufficiently brisk at each stage of a lesson.

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

**James McNeillie**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**