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Mrs C Spencer
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Spencer

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 25 and 26 February 2013 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 ten lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

Achievement in English is good.

- In GCSE English Language and English Literature attainment is above average. In 2012, attainment dipped in English Language but remained well above average in English Literature. Reliable academy assessments show that the current Year 11 is on track to attain above average GCSE results in 2013.
- Students make good progress in English. Rates of progress dipped in 2012 due to the lower than expected GCSE results in English Language. Current assessments show that Year 11 students are making good progress from their starting points at Key Stage 2.
- Students of all abilities develop the confidence to voice their opinions and to increase their understanding through productive dialogue with teachers and other students. Students contribute well to English lessons and treat

each other's views with respect. In some lessons at Key Stage 3, some do not always make as much progress as they could when the work is not closely enough matched to the different levels of ability in the class.

Teaching in English is good.

- Teachers' expertise and effective conduct of classroom dialogue stimulate students' thinking and successfully extend their knowledge and understanding. Teachers have good relationships with their classes and use questions skilfully to get students to express and explain their views. Students are positive about the encouraging climate for learning in English. Carefully planned tasks, supported by well-designed resources, enable students to learn and practise their skills in analysing texts. Teaching makes good use of creative activity such as drama and role play and students are regularly given the opportunity to make independent choices in how they tackle tasks. In an outstanding lesson, the teacher's humorous presentation inspired the students and sharply focused tasks provided them with a well-paced sequence of practical challenges.
- On occasion, in Years 7 and 8, the planning of activities does not target the different levels of ability in the class with enough accuracy or challenge. Classrooms do not consistently display well-presented guidance on how to improve written language.
- Good marking regularly provides personal and detailed comment on what students have done well and sets accurate targets for how they can improve. The department has recently introduced a promising system for students to respond to the teacher's marking.

The curriculum in English is good.

- At Key Stage 3, the units of work are popular with students and successfully engage them in learning. They cover a good range of poetry, drama and media and include Shakespeare in each year. Each unit has a well-planned sequence of lesson plans and assessments which effectively guide the teaching and learning. The department has started to review the Key Stage 3 curriculum to identify opportunities for setting work at different levels more explicitly.
- In Years 7 and 8, reading lessons are well-supported by the library and provide good encouragement for students to read for pleasure. Older students work effectively as reading partners with Year 7 and 8 students. Adult volunteers read with targeted students, who value this support. The department has recently started to provide additional support for students who are underachieving at Key Stage 3.
- The Key Stage 4 units of work and controlled assessments are planned effectively. Students in Years 10 and 11 who attend extra English lessons value the opportunity to practise and extend their skills. An extensive programme of additional support is provided for students of all abilities who are at risk of not achieving their target grade.

- A radio club and a creative writing group are popular with those that attend. Good opportunities are provided to see the plays that students are studying.

Leadership and management of English are good.

- The new head of department communicates a clear vision and provides energetic leadership. She is supported well by the second in department. The leaders have established good team relationships in a department that has five new members and they share a strong sense of common endeavour. Evaluation of the strengths and inconsistencies in the department is accurate. New policies set out clear expectations, for example, for marking. The departmental development plan has clear priorities and a well-formulated programme of actions. Effective steps have been taken to bring about further improvements, for example extending the range of extra support for underachieving students and introducing a new method for marking. Three newly qualified teachers receive effective support, are developing well and are already taking initiatives to develop aspects of English provision.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- in Years 7 and 8, further developing the use of assessment to ensure that tasks are more regularly targeted at students' different levels of skill
- improving the quality of classroom display to guide students' writing.

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.

Yours sincerely

Bernard Campbell
Her Majesty's Inspector