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Mr Tim Bassett
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Bassett

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 28 November 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: discussion with you, members of your senior leadership team, the Head of English, teachers and students; seven lessons, each observed with a member of your senior or subject leadership team; review of departmental documents and information about students' progress and attainment; and scrutiny of students' work.

The overall effectiveness of English is outstanding.

Achievement in English is outstanding.

- Your students make conspicuously better progress than students nationally. Gaps in the achievement of different groups, including those students eligible for additional government funding (the pupil premium), are small and are closing in response to well-targeted support.
- Students are keen to do well. From Year 7 upwards, they speak enthusiastically about the topics studied and the department's encouragement of independent reading and discussion. They also appreciate opportunities to develop their individual interests through a wide range of extra-curricular activities. As a student explained, 'It's all about achieving the best that you can.'

- Students' attainment, both in English Language and English Literature, shows improvement year on year and is significantly above the national average. Provisional results for 2013 show 82% gaining A* to C in English Language and 81% in English Literature, for which all students are entered. Results already achieved by the current Year 11 indicate that the upward trend will continue.

Teaching in English is outstanding.

- As students' achievement demonstrates, teaching across all ability groups and in both key stages is highly effective. Amongst the strengths observed during the inspection were: secure subject knowledge enthusiastically communicated; high expectations for most students; careful lesson planning that was well-matched to students' knowledge and skills and to their diverse learning styles; and helpful marking and feedback.
- Teachers develop constructive links between learning in the classroom and the world beyond school. Year 8 students, for example, responded imaginatively and thoughtfully to possibilities suggested by short extracts from a Carol Ann Duffy poem, 'Stealing', which they were challenged to analyse and organise before reading the original. This led to lively discussion about shared preconceptions about gender and patterns of behaviour. It illustrated what a student meant when speaking of teachers' ability to cast light on 'the creative process behind the writing'.
- Occasionally, teachers miss exploiting unplanned opportunities to extend and deepen the exploration of a topic. This means that the most able are not always fully challenged. When teachers in their marking do not explain *why* something is good, students do not know how to build on their successes and, again, the most able are not prompted to be even more ambitious. Occasionally, a teacher's determination to keep the pace of learning brisk means students do not have time to complete a task or think through a question.

The curriculum in English is outstanding.

- Schemes of work from Year 7 to Year 11 are carefully planned to develop students' skills and knowledge progressively. In Key Stage 3, which is being extended to three years, each topic or unit of study is built around a well-judged selection of texts. Students are encouraged to develop their ideas and their range of expression through reading and discussion, which gives them the tools and the confidence needed to write effectively. Themes such as 'Battle of the Sexes' and 'Murder and Madness' capture students' interest while also leading them through an ambitious programme of traditional and modern fiction and non-fiction, poetry and prose. The library plays an important part in encouraging students to read widely and for pleasure.
- While most students are entered for GCSE English Language, a few are entered for the International GCSE because it is better suited to their learning style. All students take GCSE English Literature. Students are

emphatic that being taught in ability-based sets helps them, not least because the choice of set texts is well-matched to each group. Their results are excellent.

- The mainstream curriculum is extremely well complemented by a lively and varied programme of additional activities. As well as booster and revision sessions to support those encountering difficulties with any aspect of their GCSE courses, opportunities include theatre trips, visiting writers, the Student Voice – a filmed news report regularly produced by students – a book club and a creative writing group.

Leadership and management of English are outstanding.

- Well supported by the academy chain to which The Rawlett School belongs, you and your senior leaders have set high expectations and established a strong and shared sense of purpose. Line-management for English is knowledgeable and constructive. You clearly and justifiably value the role played by the English department in modelling effective teaching and learning.
- The department plays a key role in developing constructive links with the large number of primary schools from which your students come. These links include sharing of good practice, collaborative planning and assessment.
- The head of department brings to his role energy, enterprise, breadth of subject knowledge and a readiness to exploit opportunities. He leads a strong team and is successfully balancing the need to establish consistency of good practice and a coherent curriculum with the benefits of encouraging teachers to play to their individual strengths in their approach to texts and topics.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that the most able students are fully challenged, both in lessons and through the marking of their work
- matching the pace of lessons consistently to students' pace of writing and thinking.

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

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector