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3 February 2014

Mr M Sibley  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Sibley

### **Ofsted 2013–14 subject survey inspection programme: English**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 21 and 22 January 2014 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 observations of eight lessons, including some with senior leaders.

### **The overall effectiveness of English is good.**

#### **Achievement in English is good.**

- Attainment in GCSE English Language and Literature is average. In 2013, fewer students than average gained A\* and A grades. GCSE English Language results already gained for 2014 show that a higher percentage of the current Year 11 gained A\* and A, and A\*-C grades.
- In previous years, progress at GCSE was significantly lower than the national average. In 2014, early GCSE results show that the proportion of Year 11 making three levels of progress exceeded the 2013 national average. The percentage making four levels of progress was close to average. This marked improvement included faster progress by boys and the more able; groups that had underachieved in recent years.
- In 2013, achievement in A-level English Language improved at A- and AS level. Achievement was average at A Level and above average at AS.

- School data show that the proportion making expected progress at Key Stage 3 has improved over the last three years. However, the proportion of more able pupils making accelerated progress has not increased.
- Students enjoy the range of activities, are well motivated by their relationships with staff and are well directed by targets and assessment.

### **Teaching in English is good.**

- Most teaching is good. Observed teaching by a few staff new to the school required improvement. In the recent past, instability in staffing limited the quality of teaching and learning. Teaching of English Language in the sixth form is good.
- In better teaching, the carefully-planned sequence of activities and good use of resources developed students' understanding of literature and language and enabled them to learn and apply analytical skills well. In one lesson, the teacher's sharp focus on challenging words and phrases in pre-twentieth century literature extended pupils' learning to higher levels.
- In an outstanding sixth form lesson on the development of early language, the teacher's skilful questioning enabled students to link their live observations of babies and their parents to theories, concepts and terminology.
- In the occasional weaker teaching seen, tasks were too mechanical, examples of what students should achieve in their writing were not provided, and key features of grammar were not explained clearly enough. In one lesson, the work lacked intellectual challenge.
- Frequent formal assessment provides students with good information about their strengths and areas for improvement. Good peer- and self-assessment helps students to improve their work and to set personal targets. On occasion, in both teaching and marking, the focus on spelling, grammar and punctuation is at the expense of improving higher level features of writing.

### **The curriculum in English is good**

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum provides a good balance of topics and a strong focus on skills. Each unit of work provides students and teachers with a clear map of the skills to be learnt, a firm structure of regular assessment and homework tasks. Lesson plans are being developed collaboratively and the quantity and range of learning resources increased, as part of the development of the new team of teachers.
- At Key Stage 4, the curriculum has been adapted to improve outcomes at GCSE. Students who did not reach their target in GCSE English Language in Year 10 took the international GCSE in English Language in Year 11. The results from this examination have contributed to higher proportion of the cohort gaining good grades in a recognised English Language GCSE in 2014. Most students will also sit the international GCSE in English Literature in summer 2014.

- In the sixth form, the range of the English curriculum was reduced by the lack of take-up for A Level English Literature. With the increased popularity of English at Key Stage 4, and the higher proportion of A\* and A grades at GCSE, there is a sharp increase in the number of students who have registered an interest in taking-up A Level English Literature in 2014.
- A well-structured computer-based learning programme supports weaker readers and a well-run buddy-reading programme promotes reading for pleasure. Both programmes have increased students' reading ages. Students have good access to information and communications technology and blogs encourage work at home.
- The library promotes reading for pleasure effectively. The librarian carefully surveys student opinion and their suggestions are used to provide resources that meet their interests. Reading challenges and rewards are popular with students at Key Stage 3. Opportunities to meet writers or visit the theatre are under-developed
- Literacy skills are being developed well across different subjects with a clearly-communicated and systematic approach to improving students' sentence construction and vocabulary and regular checks on spelling, grammar and punctuation.

### **Leadership and management of English are good.**

- Over the last three years, the subject leader and senior staff have brought about significant improvements in staffing, the curriculum, teaching and assessment. The 2014 GCSE outcomes demonstrate that leaders have overcome the underachievement of the recent past and confirm that better teaching and learning have begun to improve progress at all key stages. The department is well led and more stable, but is still at a relatively early stage of development.
- The subject leader provides strong direction for teaching, assessment and the curriculum. She works closely with an assistant headteacher who teaches and line manages English. They form a powerful leadership partnership and demonstrate good models of teaching.
- New and less experienced members of staff receive effective support to improve their teaching. Filmed lessons provide good opportunities for teachers to observe and reflect on teaching and learning.
- Lesson observation provides a succinct and accurate summary of teachers' strengths and weaknesses and plans for action. The performance management of teachers focuses accurately on tackling identified weaknesses in student performance. The accuracy of teachers' assessment is checked rigorously.

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

- further strengthening the teaching of newer members of staff
- ensuring that more students make faster progress in developing the higher level reading and writing skills at all key stages.

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**