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Mr B Scriven
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Dear Mr Scriven

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 12-13 May 2009 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of eight lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Standards in English are well above average. Students' achievement is good.

- Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 are well above average. Standards in the English Literature course in the sixth form are also above average while standards in English Language are nearer to the national average.
- The gap between girls' and boys' attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is narrower than the national trend. Most students obtain GCSE grades A*-C in both English Language and English Literature although fewer boys than girls achieve the higher grades. There are no marked differences between the standards achieved by other groups of students in the school.
- Standards on entry to the school in Year 7 are generally high although students tend to do better in reading than in writing. Some of the evidence available suggests that boys make more progress than girls

overall; this is different from the national trend. Test results show that progress has tended to be better across Key Stage 3 than Key Stage 4. However, GCSE results have improved considerably since 2006 and achievement is now good across Key Stages 3 and 4. Progress in lessons observed was good overall but varied according to the quality of teaching.

- Achievement in the English Literature Advanced level course is very good while progress in English Language is good.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning of English is good.

- Although teaching and learning are good overall, there is a variability in quality across the department that potentially limits the achievement of some students. There is a strong core of good and outstanding teaching in English that can be used to raise the quality overall.
- English is popular with students. This is shown in the number of students who opt for English in the sixth form and the positive attitudes of students in most lessons. Most students speak highly of teaching in English. They value their teachers' enthusiasm and the high level of support provided. They enjoy the variety in lessons and opportunities to participate fully in group work, discussion and drama activities.
- Lesson observations confirmed that relationships between teachers and students are very strong in most classes. There is good subject knowledge throughout the department. Most lessons feature a wide range of lively activities that engage students and enable them to work together and share ideas. Students are helped to reflect on strengths and weaknesses in their work. The level of challenge is high in most lessons and able students respond well to this. Some teaching observed was highly imaginative.
- Where lessons were less effective, this was sometimes because planning was too much focused on teaching activities rather than learning outcomes for students. At other time, teachers needed to manage discussion better in order to involve all students and to provide more opportunities for students to talk at length.
- Assessment in English is good. In discussion, most students were very clear about their targets in English and what they needed to do to improve their work. This at least partly reflects an effective approach to assessing work through well planned end-of-unit tasks that provide good feedback on students' work. The best marking is very thorough and helpful in informing students about strengths and weaknesses in writing. However, the quality is variable across classes and some marking does not give students enough feedback about their next steps in English.

Quality of curriculum

The curriculum in English is good.

- The English curriculum is successful at engaging and enthusing most students. It is also effective in ensuring that students make good progress overall as they move through the school.
- The school provides a good range of courses in English and related studies at both GCSE and sixth form level. It also enters nearly all students for English Literature at GCSE.
- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is currently being revised. The new schemes are well planned, coherent and provide a broad and balanced programme with good opportunities for poetry and media work. The department also has a systematic approach to promoting wider independent reading across Key Stage 3. There are good links with the two school libraries. The department is aware that there are too few opportunities at present for the use of Information and Communication Technology in English, including work on moving image texts. Assessment is integrated very effectively into schemes of work and includes speaking and listening as well as reading and writing.
- There is a good two year plan for the GCSE course which aims to balance course work more effectively with examination preparation. This has contributed to improved results at the end of Key Stage 4.
- The department provides good, additional support for students outside lessons, focused especially on the most able students and C/D borderline students. Extra resources have been generated to support lower attaining students and there is also a lunchtime club that helps younger students with their reading.
- The department provides a range of enrichment activities including theatre visits. An innovative project involves students from all year groups working as Student Ambassadors to a local theatre.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management are good.

- The department is well led. The subject leader is a very effective classroom practitioner and thus in a good position to model good practice in teaching and learning. She has very clear ideas about the subject and how it should be taught. This provides good direction to English although this vision is not wholly captured at present in departmental documentation. Responsibility is well shared across the department and this has enabled other teachers to take responsibility and provide an effective lead in key areas of work.
- Teachers work well together, for instance in writing and sharing schemes of work and there are plans to share good practice more

systematically through peer observations. The capacity for further improvement is good.

- The department has produced a detailed and thorough self-evaluation. This is effective overall in identifying strengths and weaknesses. It is well supported by a good quality subject improvement plan which is firmly focused on raising standards further and monitors developments well. However, the plan is less clear about what is needed to improve teaching.
- The department makes use of a wide range of evidence to evaluate progress in English including regular lesson observations and moderation of students' work. The department frequently asks students for feedback on their courses. There are good and supportive links with the senior leadership team.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- using existing good and outstanding practice in English to improve the quality of teaching and assessment throughout the department.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop English in the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority/local Learning and Skills Council. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term and made available to the team for the next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Philip Jarrett HMI
Subject Adviser for English