

Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040  
F 020 7421 6855  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



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Mr C Sheeran  
Headteacher  
Cowley Language College  
Hard Lane  
St Helens  
Merseyside  
WA10 6LB

Dear Mr Sheeran

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 8 and 9 December 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 included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and the observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English was is good.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is good.

- There is a rising trend to English results at the end of Key Stage 4 and GCSE standards were broadly average in 2009. The department also increased the proportion of students who reached the higher levels.
- Contextual value-added data suggest that progress across Key Stages 3 and 4 has been no better than satisfactory in recent years. However, other data provided by the school show that many students enter the school with below average attainment in literacy. The progress made by students has improved in recent years and is now good overall. However, students make more progress in the GCSE course than at Key Stage 3.
- Nearly all students obtain a pass grade in their sixth-form English courses although less than average numbers achieve high grades at A level. Progress in the sixth form is broadly satisfactory.

- The progress of boys and girls in English is broadly similar. However, girls attain more highly. Other groups of students achieve equally well although some students with special educational needs and/or disabilities do particularly well.

### Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- The vast majority of students enjoy English lessons. They praise the support offered by teachers and the level of care they show. They value teachers' enthusiasm while also drawing attention to some variation in the impact of teaching.
- Lessons observed were satisfactory overall although some teaching was good or outstanding.
- In all lessons, relationships were strong and students responded with interest. Lessons were planned very well and learning objectives were mostly clear and specific. In a few lessons, over-generalised aims failed to give lessons sufficient direction.
- All teachers made good use of a wide range of interactive approaches that motivated students. Occasionally, lessons were over-planned and the activities chosen did not all contribute sufficiently to students' learning. The most effective lessons were characterised by very good subject knowledge and challenging questioning that extended learning. Expectations were sometimes too low in lessons and this limited students' progress.
- Assessment is good. Teachers consistently set each student three specific learning targets that are reviewed and updated as the year develops. The policy is understood well by students and helps them to know what to do next. Marking is thorough and detailed. The best identifies very clearly the next steps for students. However, marking too rarely reinforces students' individual targets.

### Quality of the curriculum in English

The curriculum in English is good with some outstanding features.

- The English curriculum has been designed well to meet the needs of students. For example, the department teaches a pilot GCSE course in English and this has contributed to higher standards and a more enthusiastic response from students. Sixth-form provision is broad and effective, offering separate English Language and English Literature courses alongside the International Baccalaureate.
- There are a number of innovative features to the Key Stage 3 curriculum. Wide independent reading is promoted well through regular timetabled lessons and media work, including opportunities for students to make films and web-logs. The department makes good use of contemporary fiction. There are fewer opportunities to work in detail on other types of non-

literary text and lesson observations suggest that the approach to texts sometimes emphasises analysis at the expense of creative responses.

- There is an excellent programme of enrichment activities. In particular, a substantial number of writers have worked with students in the school. Students also enter film making competitions and produce a school magazine. A host of activities, including various clubs, support reading.
- There is a good programme of intervention initiatives for students who need extra help with English, including the Writing Challenge and some paired reading.
- The school has also established literacy as an important cross-curricular topic and this is supported well through the work of the coordinator and common targets across all departments.

### Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is good.

- The subject leader provides very good direction to work in English and exemplifies good teaching well. He has worked effectively with colleagues to provide an innovative curriculum that is helping to raise standards. Teachers are committed and keen to learn from others.
- The subject leader is supported well by other colleagues who take responsibility for aspects of English. This delegation works well.
- Students' progress is monitored systematically and this information is used well to provide appropriate support and intervention.
- Some monitoring activities are of high quality. This includes the regular online review of teachers' planning which provides each teacher with helpful feedback about their work. There have been fewer opportunities for detailed lesson observations across this large department and this has led to a gap in the improvement plan in identifying measures for further enhancing the quality of teaching. There is good and outstanding practice within the department and this needs to be shared more effectively to improve achievement further.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the proportion of good and outstanding teaching by:
  - ensuring that teachers use clear and specific learning objectives rather than student activities to plan for students' progress
  - having consistently high expectations of what students can do and achieve
  - using monitoring approaches more effectively to identify ways of further improving teaching and to share existing good practice.

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. It will also be made available to the team for the next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Philip Jarrett  
Her Majesty's Inspector