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Ms J Shadick
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Dear Ms Shadick

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 7 and 8 February 2012 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 nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is outstanding.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is good.

- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 has risen strongly over recent years and was broadly average in 2011. In GCSE English Language, 80% of students achieved grades A* to C and this represents a significant achievement given the low starting points for many of these students. Students who were eligible for free school meals and boys performed particularly well. English Literature results also improved but remained below average. Attainment in the small sixth form is broadly average and students make at least satisfactory progress.
- Progress is good overall and some students make outstanding progress. Students with below average or average prior attainment perform more strongly than those who join the school at Level 5. Current assessments confirm that progress remains at least good overall and that challenging targets for 2012 are likely to be met.

- Attainment on entry is below average but with a significant gap between students' abilities in reading and writing. Although good progress is made with writing and all students gain in confidence, weaknesses remain in areas such as spelling and grammar.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is outstanding.

- Students are extremely positive about English. They acknowledge the consistently high quality of teaching and praise teachers' enthusiasm, the support provided, the variety in lessons, and the use of lively, engaging activities. These views were confirmed by feedback from parents, governors, ex-students and teachers in other departments in the school.
- Teaching observed was good overall. Strengths included: very good relationships, good-quality planning; a strong emphasis on assessment criteria, with students checking their own progress and setting improvement targets; and some good opportunities for students to exercise choice and work independently. Effective teaching strategies to meet the needs of the most or least able students were noted in some lessons but this was not always consistent. At times, lesson objectives were too broad to provide sufficient direction to learning.
- The quality of marking is very high. Teachers mark extended pieces of work in great detail, providing helpful targets for improvement. Students are aware of their levels and the assessment criteria. Assessment is highly consistent across the department.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is outstanding.

- The curriculum is distinctive and built directly around the needs of students. It engages students and enables them to achieve well. The curriculum is constructed collaboratively by the whole department who produces units of work together. It is well planned and reviewed, and a good range of resources and teaching ideas to guides new members of staff. Assessment is well integrated. Good efforts to make the curriculum relevant to students include involving the world outside school.
- There is a strong emphasis on traditional texts, with Shakespeare studied every year. However, this is balanced alongside equal emphasis on the study of contemporary, media texts. Wider reading is encouraged well through a mixture of approaches including recommendations by teachers, book lists for targeted students, the effective use of class novels, and close links with parents about reading. The department has been successful in providing students with regular opportunities for writing. The work scrutiny suggested, nevertheless, that some younger students produce too few extended pieces of writing.
- Enrichment is very good and includes: a debating society; reading clubs; a school newspaper; boys' reading programmes; and an English 'Star of the

Week' initiative. Intervention and catch-up are equally thorough and include an Easter school, weekly revision sessions, and extra English lessons for targeted students in tutorial time.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is outstanding.

- The department has a very strong sense of direction based on the work over several years of dedicated and visionary subject leaders. Practice is consistent because the department is cohesive and supportive. Teachers learn from each other and share good practice. Very good support is provided for new teachers. All teachers are valued and given opportunities to contribute to the development of the subject. Teachers work very closely together.
- Senior and subject leaders have brought about substantial and sustained improvements in achievement. English receives good support from senior leaders team who value the work of the department and use it to drive up standards elsewhere in the school. There is no complacency and teachers are keen to discuss how their practice can be improved.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and thorough, making good use of a wide range of monitoring activities. Students' progress is monitored carefully leading to effective intervention across both key stages. Action taken has brought about improvement, for example, in boys' achievement. Particularly effective use has been made of students' views. For example, Student Ambassadors observe lessons and feed back to the department.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising attainment in writing by:
 - providing more opportunities for extended writing
 - promoting consistent approaches to teaching spelling and grammar.

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

Philip Jarrett
Her Majesty's Inspector