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Mrs G Freear
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Freear

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 17 and 18 May 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 11 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is outstanding.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is good and improving rapidly.

- Attainment at GCSE is now broadly average and improving rapidly. The school's data indicate that current Year 11 students are on track to attain above average GCSE results. Published data show that attainment for students known to be eligible for free school meals and for those with low prior attainment is above average when compared with similar groups nationally.
- Students make good, and often outstanding, progress given their attainment on entry to the school is consistently low. This is due to teaching that is at least good with much that is outstanding. All groups of students make progress that is at least in line with similar groups nationally, with the exception of boys from Black minority ethnic heritage. The school's data indicate this gap is closing due to more engaging lessons.

- Most students enjoy their English lessons and demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. They are developing independence in investigating texts and discussing their views in creative writing, and they work very well together in groups.
- Students on the A-level courses make good progress and attain broadly average results from lower than average starting points. Those on the A2 course challenge each other's views in groups, displaying very good analytical skills and knowledge of literary criticism.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is outstanding.

- The characteristic strengths of teaching are: teachers' strong subject knowledge, exceptionally high expectations, very positive relationships between teachers and students, consistently well-structured lessons, and a variety of teaching styles that engages all students.
- In the best lessons, no time is lost and skilful use of probing questions extends students' thinking and independent responses. For example, in a Year 11 lesson, the teacher asked questions that challenged the group presentations on Steinbeck's use of language. Her modelling of technical vocabulary and constant reference to the GCSE criteria enabled the students to understand how to improve their work to the next grade.
- Students value the well-planned, structured lessons and teachers' detailed marking that enables them to know how to improve their work. They engage enthusiastically in the visual, auditory and kinaesthetic activities that enable them to apply and develop their skills independently and to learn at a rapid pace.
- Challenging targets and assessment are used very effectively to match lessons to the range of students' needs across and within the teaching sets. Consequently, students with both low and high prior attainment achieve very well. Very good use is made of teaching assistants to support low attaining students and those at an early stage of speaking English.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- While the English curriculum is broad, balanced and meets students' needs increasingly well, it is not yet outstanding because it does not promote students' independent reading sufficiently and the use of media technology is limited to film clips.
- Schemes of work give excellent attention to developing students' skills in spoken and written language. The school provides a variety of appropriate intervention, such as the local authority's very effective 'Lit Programme' which develops the reading skills of low attaining students in Year 7.
- A wide range of enrichment activities enhances students' learning and confidence in public speaking. Students engage enthusiastically and successfully in debating and writing competitions. They also participate in

World Book Day celebrations and enjoy visits from authors, although few are motivated to read their books.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is outstanding.

- The Head of English has nurtured a highly consistent and successful department through her shared vision of raising attainment and inspiring a passion for the subject.
- Clear direction is provided through the English action plan, the engagement of the whole team in sharing good practice including through coaching and team teaching, and in the systems for planning, marking and assessment.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and includes rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the progress of individuals and groups of students, and of the quality of teaching. It informs relevant priorities for improvement, such as the progress of specific groups of boys. Teachers are held to account for the progress of their teaching groups and supported in providing appropriate intervention for individuals in lessons.
- Given the track record in raising attainment and improving the quality of teaching and learning, and the effective systems that have been established, the department's capacity for further improvement is outstanding.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- promoting students' independent and wider reading
- increasing the use of media technology.

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

Sue Frater
Her Majesty's Inspector