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Mr A Nicholson
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Nicholson

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 26 and 27 January 2011 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 seven lessons and short visits to a further three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is outstanding.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is outstanding.

- The school has a record of sustained high attainment in English and the current Year 11 students are on course to maintain it.
- Students make extremely good progress, throughout the school, in reading, writing, speaking and listening. However, a significant number do not develop sufficiently good handwriting.
- Close monitoring of students' progress and very effective programmes of support ensure that no groups of students underachieve.
- Students' success is supported by their positive attitudes to learning and to the subject. They are strongly committed to achievement within a school culture where the best is expected of every student.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is outstanding.

- Teachers know their subject very well and they build excellent relationships with students. Lessons are enjoyable and are often characterised by an atmosphere of determined, shared pursuit of understanding.
- Lessons are well structured so that students' skills and understanding are built up progressively. Students are extremely well involved in judging their own progress towards clear, challenging targets.
- Questioning is often used very effectively to lead students to think more deeply about literature they are studying.
- Teachers hold students' attention and interest and enable all to succeed by using a variety of methods and activities in each lesson.
- Students recognise and appreciate the high quality of teaching from staff who are 'happy and smiley' and always have time to help them.
- Where observed lessons were good rather than outstanding, they were less effective because of a slower pace of learning and, on occasions, a lack of attention to detail, for instance omitting to display instructions for tasks as well as giving them verbally.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is outstanding.

- The curriculum is well-balanced, ensuring proper coverage of all elements, including poetry, media, and information and communication technology.
- The effectiveness and appropriateness of the curriculum are kept under close review and well-considered adjustments are made and innovations introduced to ensure it meets all students' needs. A recent review has led to a greater focus on developing students' handwriting in Key Stage 3.
- The school provides very effective bespoke programmes of work for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The curriculum is enriched well with visits and visitors, productions and extra activities, such as participation in the county's Book of the Year project and celebration of World Book Day. Students appreciate the good range of extra-curricular clubs.
- Personal reading is encouraged and time allocated to it. For a number of students, the literacy club stimulates wider reading. Some form tutors keep a close eye on students' reading and guide them towards suitable books. However, this good practice is not universal.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are outstanding.

- Teamwork is very strong. Staff are enthusiastic and highly motivated. At all levels there is a reflective culture and a relentless focus on continuous development of the quality of teaching and learning.
- The evaluation of the effectiveness of teaching is robust and accurate. Strong models of teaching are used very well to improve the overall quality of provision. Teachers new to the profession and to the school are nurtured very well.
- Senior staff are very well informed about students' attainment and progress and are fully involved in decisions about adjustments to the provision to ensure students achieve their best.
- Staff contribute their expertise to development projects working with other local schools.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- building on the work that has begun to ensure that all students develop the ability to write fluently, legibly and speedily
- spreading the best practice in promoting and monitoring students' wider, independent reading more widely across the school.

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

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website under the URN for your school. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Pat Kime
Her Majesty's Inspector