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Mr D Mills
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Mills

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 19-20 February 2008 to look at work in English.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject the visit had a particular focus on our current survey theme: independent learning 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 pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of seven lessons. The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good and standards in English are above average.

- On entry to the school attainment is average. By the end of Key Stage 3 attainment in the last three years has been above average.
- Key Stage 4 GCSE English language results have been consistently above the national average for the last three years.
- In 2007 there was a decline in the GCSE English literature results caused in part by the long term sick leave of the class teacher. Current standards indicate that this decline is being reversed.
- All students including the high proportion of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve equally well.
- The department's contextual value added figures are significantly above the national average. This confirms that achievement is good in English.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning in English is good.

- The department has a consistent view on what constitutes good teaching. All teachers follow the agreed criteria for what makes a good lesson.
- Teaching seen was never less than good. Teachers always started their lessons with an intended learning outcome being set. They then moved on to a variety of activities aimed at maintaining students' concentration. Questioning strategies successfully elicited good responses from keen students. Each lesson ended with a plenary allowing for some self and peer evaluation.
- Students spoke fondly of their teachers and of the support that they received.
- The department has made assessment for learning a priority for development. The result has been improved monitoring and tracking of progress. Targets are set and successfully monitored.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- Teachers plan their lessons carefully ensuring a variety of activities. The strong focus on reading has paid off with students speaking enthusiastically about what they read.
- English teachers are particularly successful in coaching their students in examination techniques. The students have a good understanding of what examiners are looking for.
- All students receive the same good opportunities for improving their basic English skills.
- There is a wide ranging and much appreciated enrichment programme.
- Teachers make good use of opportunities that arise to celebrate British cultural diversity although department plans do not explicitly include strategies for doing this.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management of English are good.

- English is well managed and led by an enthusiastic and hard working head of department. She works very closely with colleagues on planning and implementation.
- Departmental handbook and policies are comprehensive. Planning is based on excellent schemes of work. This leads to good lesson plans which cater well for different abilities.

- The department fully understands its strengths and weaknesses and plans accordingly. The result is that current Year 11 students are doing well in English literature. The very small number of higher attaining boys in Key Stage 3 is being effectively challenged.

Independent learning in English

Provision for independent learning is good.

- The English department makes a major contribution to the school's priority of focusing on the student voice through allowing its students to make choices of what they read and what topics to cover.
- Teachers create a variety of opportunities in order to ensure that students get a lot of chances of working independently. This is appreciated by students.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is well used especially in Key Stage 4, where students carry out a great deal of independent research.

Inclusion

Inclusion in English is good.

- Students speak well of their teachers and of English provision. They are all included in the work of the department.
- Because students experience a variety of activities their different learning styles are effectively catered for.
- Reading is what bonds students together. They read independently as well as in groups. The department carefully monitors inclusion by ensuring that all pupils are given the same opportunities. As a result, it immediately offers effective support to any students identified as underachieving, as has been the case with the small number of high attaining boys in Key Stage 3.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the GCSE English literature results
- increasing the opportunities available for students to celebrate British cultural diversity.

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 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

Faysal Mikdadi
Additional Inspector