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Mr N Calvert
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Calvert

Ofsted subject survey: good practice in English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 26 June 2009 to look at assessment 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 made included: discussions with you, the subject leaders, English teachers and students from Key Stage 3; scrutiny of subject documentation; examples of students' work; and teachers' assessment.

Features of good practice observed

- The English department is very well led and assessment practice is highly effective. Teachers fully support the vision for and practice of assessment. There is an excellent climate of sharing ideas and developing approaches to assessment across the team.
- Assessment systems are constantly refined on the basis of thorough monitoring and well-focused evaluation of their impact.
- Teachers establish students' current levels effectively, relate these to key criteria for achievement and identify for students the next steps towards improvement.
- Assessment grids, based on the National Strategy's 'assessing pupils' progress' documentation, have been very effectively amended to clarify the criteria for specific levels in reading, writing, speaking and listening. Teachers use the grids exceptionally well to track students' progress.
- Students understand the system of assessment grids and target sheets, and how these help them to know what they should do to improve further.

- The department has already amended target sheets for next year to be phrased as questions so that students are prompted to reflect on their work and make the necessary improvements. This amendment is already working very well where it is used by teachers as a trial.
- Students are very familiar with a variety of activities that require them to assess the work of their peers. They are used to applying assessment criteria to writing and speaking tasks. They feel strongly that this helps them to learn and to improve their own work. However, students are less familiar with assessing their own work using the criteria.
- There is an excellent series of booklets for parents, pitched at different National Curriculum levels for reading and writing, to help them understand what students need to do to achieve the standards and how they might help.
- Each student has a portfolio of work which contains examples that have improvement and amendments shown rather than just clean, final copies so that they can track their progress and check back on areas of uncertainty.
- Teachers use an excellent variety of approaches to assessment, including many based on modern technologies such as e-mail exchange of draft coursework and teachers' comments, which students appreciate.
- Assessment is central to the department's approach to teaching and learning. It has contributed strongly to improved student achievement and is now regularly a feature of teaching from Year 7 to Year 13.

Areas for development included:

- consolidating the opportunities for students to assess their own work formally so that they understand how this process can help them to improve further.

I hope 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 Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Martin Cragg
Her Majesty's Inspector