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Mr T Withers
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Dear Mr Withers

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 29 and 30 January 2013 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 ten lessons which were jointly observed with senior staff.

The overall effectiveness of English is outstanding.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is outstanding.

- Attainment in English by the end of Year 11 has been high for the past three years and students make outstanding progress across the school. There is no significant variation in achievement between different groups. Students demonstrate exceptionally positive attitudes to their English lessons. They especially enjoy the investigative approach to studying texts. They gain considerable confidence through the many opportunities they have to contribute their views and to apply their literacy skills independently.
- Attainment in A level courses is above average. Students make good and often outstanding progress. Progress is not as rapid as in GCSE courses as not all students are constantly challenged to reach the highest levels.

Almost all students go on to university, including Oxbridge, and a few gain apprenticeships.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is outstanding.

- Key strengths in teaching are teachers' subject knowledge, their passion for the subject, high expectations, the use of a variety of teaching and learning strategies, and supportive resources that provide students with a clear approach to analysing texts. Assessment is used very effectively. Students say their teachers are inspiring and that their detailed marking is a significant factor in the students' exceptional progress. Individual weaknesses are identified through regular assessments and addressed by a range of effective support. In the most successful lessons, teachers constantly assess the progress of all students and, through skilful questioning, lead them to higher levels of thinking.
- The quality of teaching and learning in the A level lessons seen was good. Effective use was made of assessment and of the chief examiner's report to tailor the lessons to the range of students' prior attainment. Students felt very well supported by the teachers' detailed feedback on their work and by the clear approaches given. Not all students were constantly challenged to reach even higher levels of thinking.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is outstanding.

- A special feature of the outstanding curriculum is the use of challenging texts in each year group, for example Priestley's 'An Inspector Calls' in Year 8. Students engage in speaking and listening, reading and writing in most lessons, often responding to a range of media or using information and communication technology. Debates, presentations and role play help to develop their confidence and independence.
- The curriculum has been planned exceptionally well to promote rapid progress across the school. By the time they reach the sixth form, students are able to draw on a wide range of texts and social, historical and critical perspectives. The library plays a key role in promoting the reading of a wide range of genres across subjects. While work in English is enhanced by a range of enrichment activities, including theatre visits and poetry competitions, the range is not extensive.

Effectiveness of leadership in and management of English

The effectiveness of leadership in and management of English is outstanding.

- Leadership in English provides an exceptionally clear vision. It enables the department to reach its aims through very clear direction provided by development planning, policies and procedures. The impact is seen in the consistently effective quality of teaching and learning. Shared assessments, schemes of work and resources on-line support teachers

who contribute part-time to the department and the classes that have more than one teacher.

- Monitoring and evaluation of lessons, students' work and progress data are accurate and inform priorities in the English development plan, for example an increased focus on enabling more sixth form students to reach the top grades.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- the use of assessment and skilful questioning during all lessons, and particularly in the sixth form, to enable more students to reach the highest grades
- extending the range of enrichment activities.

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

Sue Frater
Her Majesty's Inspector