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Mrs L Bowes
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Dear Mrs Bowes

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 6 December 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 you and with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of 11 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

Achievement in English is good.

- The attainment of students in GCSE English has been significantly above the national average over the last three years. The school's data indicate that it is likely to remain so.
- Attainment on entry to the school is average. From this, students consistently make good or better progress. However, in 2013, those pupils eligible for additional government funding (the pupil premium), boys and those from a Pakistani heritage background did not do as well as their peers. A substantial number of students entered after Year 9 due to a local school closure. Despite the supportive actions taken, there was not sufficient time to close the gap for a large number of these students who had been underachieving significantly in their previous school.
- Students' level of knowledge and understanding, and the way they express their views orally, show that they are working at levels that are at least in

line with what would be expected for students of their age and, in many cases, better.

- Standards in A level English courses are inconsistent and lower than expected. Over time, standards have improved but fell in 2013.

Teaching in English is good.

- Overall, teaching is good, with several examples of outstanding teaching. A very small amount requires improvement.
- Key features of good teaching are high expectations, teaching that is well matched to need and the effective use of questioning and discussion that challenges and moves students' learning on at a pace. Students' ability to explain their thinking and write critical evaluations using subject specific vocabulary indicate consistently good teaching. Students in the sixth form describe teaching as being, 'impressive' and of a 'high standard'.
- In the very small amount of teaching that requires improvement, teachers do not plan or structure lessons well enough to match the needs of all learners. In some cases, there are missed opportunities to check, intervene and challenge learners to ensure good progress. Students are not always given opportunities to respond to questions or given the thinking time they need. Some lessons move on too quickly, so that students are unclear about what they need to do.
- The application of the school's assessment and marking and feedback policies is inconsistent. Students in Key Stages 4 and 5 know their targets and level grades. They know how to improve their work through the feedback they receive. Students in Key Stage 3 are not all aware of their targets and scrutiny of students' books shows that marking and feedback are variable.

The curriculum in English is good.

- The curriculum is under review. Teachers are adapting and developing the present curriculum in creative and innovative ways to engage students and support the development of key skills. Lesson observations and discussions with students show how this is impacting on their love of literature and learning.
- An exceptionally wide range of strategies is raising standards rapidly for underachieving students, disabled students and those with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language. In some cases, these students are outperforming their peers. For instance, lessons in phonics are improving students' reading ages significantly, so that they have increased access to the whole curriculum. Reading programmes are engaging the hard to reach and involving parents and carers, so that school and home work more closely together to instil a love of reading and broaden students' and parents' reading experiences.
- The curriculum is enriched by a number of activities including visiting authors and theatre companies, theme days, events and competitions. The

school runs a successful book club which enriches students' knowledge and enjoyment of literature and develops their critical thinking

Leadership and management of English are outstanding.

- All leaders involved in developing and promoting English share an uncompromising, and increasingly successful, drive to raise standards. Aspirations are high for all.
- Outstanding subject leadership is inspiring all staff to improve the quality of their teaching. This is a team that learns and grows together.
- Rigorous analysis and accurate self-evaluation means that leaders know exactly where the gaps in achievement are and why. Gaps are closing rapidly, because they have taken urgent steps to address any in-school gaps and they check regularly on progress and impact.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising standards in students' written work in Key Stage 3 by:
 - providing more opportunities for all students to write at length in English and ensuring all teachers in the English department mark students' books in line with school policy, so that students know exactly how well they have done and what they need to improve
 - teaching and promoting high standards of handwriting and presentation
- ensuring that the regular assessments in Key Stage 3 are more effective by:
 - confirming targets are known and understood by students
 - making sure teachers use this information to help plan lessons and provide opportunities for students to learn, practise and apply basic skills and language forms
 - regularly checking, through marking, how students are progressing with their targets and providing constructive feedback.

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

Anne Bowyer
Her Majesty's Inspector