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Dear Sister Halligan

Ofsted 2013–14 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 11 and 12 March 2014 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; a meeting with a local authority representative; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observations of eleven lessons, including some with senior leaders.

The overall effectiveness of English is outstanding.

Achievement in English is outstanding.

- In 2013, attainment in English was above the national average for girls. GCSE examinations taken in November indicate similar results for 2014. The proportion gaining A* and A grades in GCSE English Language has increased markedly over the last three years.
- More students than average take GCSE English Literature. Attainment is significantly above the national average for girls. In recent years, fewer students than average gained the highest grades, but the current Year 11 are on track for more top grades.
- Year 11 students in 2011 and 2012 made more progress than the average for girls, from their starting points at Key Stage 2. In 2013, their progress was significantly above average. Rates of progress have increased over the last three years.

- The progress made by students who are eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free schools meals, those in the care of the local authority and those with parents in the armed forces), who make up 40% of the school population, is outstanding. In 2013, they made much more progress than boys and girls nationally who were not eligible for the pupil premium.
- In A-level English Literature, students consistently make better progress than girls nationally.

Teaching in English is outstanding.

- Much of the teaching is outstanding and most is good. Teaching and classroom relationships are characterised by high levels of discipline, care, mutual respect and trust. High expectations of behaviour and achievement enable students of all abilities and backgrounds to contribute and learn.
- Teachers display expert subject knowledge in their skilful and probing questions and in their reflective and analytical comments. The high quality of dialogue promotes a spirit of enquiry, intellectual challenge and thoughtful personal response.
- The high quality of students' speaking and listening is a distinctive strength of teaching and learning. Many students are confident and articulate in class discussion, speaking formally and acting in role.
- Lessons are well-structured with fluently managed sequences of activity. Learning resources provide clear guidance and practical models for analysing text and structuring writing.
- In the sixth form, teachers' passion, expertise and exposition inspire students.
- High quality marking accurately and precisely informs students in all years about what they have done well and what to do next. Self- and peer-assessment are used well to enhance students' understanding.

The curriculum in English is outstanding.

- The teaching of English Literature is a strength of the curriculum. At Key Stage 4, the high proportion entering GCSE English Literature is matched by strong results. Key Stage 3 students expressed a high level of interest and enjoyment in the range of modern and classic texts, including different genres such as science fiction and gothic literature.
- The take-up of A-level English Literature has increased and the introduction of A-level English Language has proved popular.
- Students in all year groups strongly appreciate the excellent opportunities to take part in discussion, debate, drama and role play.
- Teachers encourage reading well at Key Stage 3. Weaker readers are paired with sixth formers for weekly reading sessions. Leaders plan to strengthen the consistency and range of activities for wider reading.

- Catch-up sessions for weaker students in Year 7 and individual tuition for students in Year 11 are delivered by specialist tutors from external providers and have a positive impact on progress.
- Students regularly go on theatre visits, including a trip to the Globe and the Dickens museum in London. Students take part in debating and public speaking competitions. Sixth form students attend presentations by examiners and higher education lecturers.

Leadership and management of English are outstanding.

- The senior and subject leaders' high expectations of behaviour and achievement have created an environment for students of all abilities and backgrounds to succeed. English leaders' emphasis on thinking and dialogue enables all types of students to develop their ideas, language and confidence. This helps them to make faster progress in their reading and writing.
- Leaders of English are passionate about the subject. Three teachers are GCSE or A-level examiners. The department is a strong team that shares a common approach. The head of department is clear-thinking and well-organised. She has an accurate grasp of strengths and weaknesses in performance and acts effectively to tackle identified issues.
- Lesson observations of staff provide succinct evaluations and precise suggestions for improvement. Regular checking of students' work ensures that standards are maintained.
- Pupil premium funding supports the high quality of provision in English through an additional teaching group, catch-up provision in Key Stage 3, one-to-one tuition in Key Stage 4, and theatre visits.
- A member of the department is seconded to another school to help it improve the quality of English.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- strengthening the consistency and range of provision for wider reading at Key Stage 3.

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

Bernard Campbell
Her Majesty's Inspector