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Mr J Weeds
Principal
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Dear Mr Weeds

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 25 and 26 May 2011 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 a sixth form lesson. As lessons in Years 7 to 11 were not taking place due to school examinations, I met with groups of students from each year group to discuss their lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is outstanding.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is outstanding.

- Attainment at GCSE has been high for the past three years. Students' current attainment across reading, writing, speaking and listening is also high. The academy's data for 2011 indicate that 100% of students are on track to attain A* to C grades, with 95% on track to achieve A* or A grades in English at GCSE.
- The quality of students' learning is outstanding. In meeting with students from each year group, it is evident that behaviour is outstanding and students display very positive attitudes to learning. They apply independent learning skills such as investigation and discussion well.
- Taking published data for the past three years into account, students made satisfactory progress. However, current students are making at least

good progress and many are making outstanding progress, as seen in a sample of students' work and the academy's data. This is due in part to the use of Assessing Pupils' Performance (APP) guidelines in Key Stage 3, which is raising teachers' expectations.

- The literacy consultant provides very effective support for individual students, including innovative teaching of a parallel lesson to the class lesson. This ensures all students are able to keep up with the demanding work. All teachers have received training in supporting students with dyslexia.
- Attainment in A-level courses is high and improving. The progress of students, as seen in an A-level lesson, is outstanding. A key strength of the lesson was the way in which the students were leading their learning in groups. They extended their understanding through discussion, interrogation of the texts, and by forming challenging questions.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is outstanding.

- The key, characteristic strengths of teaching, as discussed with students and seen in the lesson observed are: well-structured lessons that lead students to new learning through a variety of tasks; engaging tasks including discussion, text interrogation, role play, media, competition and, to a lesser extent, information and communication technology; challenging questions to encourage students to think for themselves; and positive relationships that promote confidence and risk-taking.
- Students say that their lessons are 'dynamic and include fun and varied activities'. They are confident in speaking and listening. For example a group of Year 8 students interviewed Nick Clegg, Deputy Prime Minister, recently and participated in the BBC news day. They are also confident writers, stating that they know how to structure different styles of writing for different purposes and audiences. This was evident in their exercise books. Students enjoy reading serialised books and praise the English department and the academy's well run library for keeping them informed about what to read.
- Assessment is used well to inform students how to improve their work to reach their challenging targets.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is outstanding.

- The curriculum is outstanding in its breadth, balance and enrichment. Detailed schemes of work and lesson plans are resourced well and provide for rapid progression across all year groups. An extensive range of enrichment activities enables students to see the relevance of studying English. It includes visiting authors and poets such as Robert Muchamore and Jayne Draycott, public speaking competitions, and theatre visits.

- As the lead subject in the academy's humanities specialist status, English makes a positive contribution to teaching and learning across the academy. English teachers provide training for other departments, for example in the teaching of writing and in assessment.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is outstanding.

- The inspirational head of English has created a dynamic team of teachers with a shared vision of engaging the boys in the subject through lessons that are active, well paced, challenging, competitive and fun. To this end, texts and schemes of work are constantly reviewed. A consistent approach to teaching is secured by peer-observation and regular sharing of good practice.
- Self-evaluation in English is accurate and promotes high standards of attainment.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- providing measurable targets and success criteria in the subject development plan
- evaluating levels of progress made by individual students during the year, and comparing the rates of progress across teaching groups and year groups, to support the promotion of consistently outstanding progress.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop English in the school.

As I 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