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Ms J Ward
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Dear Ms Ward

Ofsted 2012–13 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 14 and 15 May 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; observation of eight lessons and visits to extra support sessions.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

Achievement in English is good.

- At the start of Year 7, attainment in English is exceptionally low. More than half the minority ethnic students enter below level 4, some of whom have recently arrived from abroad, especially Slovakia. However, one third of White British students also arrive below level 4.
- New students from abroad spend a short period in the Language Centre based at the school, which gives them an effective start in English. At the next stage, those who are below level 2b receive intensive English lessons. As a result, students make good progress in beginning to acquire English.
- In 2012, GCSE English Language results were well below average. However, students made good progress from their starting points at Key Stage 2. Teacher assessment indicates that the current Year 11 is on track for similar achievement. Most ethnic groups make good progress;

however, White British students make average progress. A low proportion takes GCSE English Literature and attainment is average.

- Students enjoy English lessons and are keen to improve. They value the opportunities to extend their vocabulary and develop their confidence in speaking.
- A few students take English Language in the sixth form but the numbers are too small for national comparison. School data indicate that current students are on track to meet their A and AS level targets.

Teaching in English is good.

- Teaching is good. Some is outstanding and a few aspects require improvement. In the best teaching, students are very well motivated because they make choices about what to write about and create their own spoken or written language. High quality planning, focused clearly on specific features of language, enables pupils to practise and develop their skills and understanding. Teachers give clear and helpful explanations and are skilful in extending students' vocabulary. Students are given good opportunities to read out loud. Good relationships and dialogue with adults contribute to students' increasing confidence to speak in English. Marking and oral feedback are generally constructive and helpful.
- On occasion, tasks are not planned precisely enough and higher ability students at Key Stage 3 are not always challenged enough. At Key Stage 3, records of assessment are not documented with sufficient rigour.
- Teaching assistants play an extensive and valuable role in questioning and supporting students to develop their understanding. However, the teaching of letters and sounds lacks consistency across teaching and support staff.
- Lessons for new arrivals in the Language Centre, and recent arrivals in the school, are expertly conducted and well structured. Teaching focuses accurately on the range of language needs with good use of visual and other resources.

The curriculum in English is outstanding.

- An exceptionally wide range of provision is carefully matched to students' very diverse language needs. The well-organised Language Centre provides students from Derby secondary schools with a strong start in English for survival in Britain and in school. Early learners are immersed in Bemrose School with an effective range of graduated support to enable them to acquire English well. The extensive deployment of teaching assistants maximises the support for students' English. Paired support for early readers by students who are more proficient in English and share the same language is proving helpful. In addition, Year 11 students are helping younger students with below average reading ages. The library provides sustained support for reading through regular, well-planned English sessions at Key Stage 3 and a wide range of extra activities.

- The content and skills of English are clearly planned and identified within the Year 7 humanities course. Students enjoy learning English in the context of history and citizenship topics. Years 8 and 9 cover an appropriate range of fiction and non-fiction. Detailed planning guides English well at Key Stage 4. The take-up of English Language in the sixth form has increased.
- Students have extensive opportunities to meet authors, go to the theatre and see filmed versions of texts they are studying. Increasing numbers of students participate in a BBC news reporting competition. Competitions, reading and film groups successfully promote enjoyment in reading, writing and discussion and reinforce English language skills.

Leadership and management of English are good.

- Senior and subject leaders have a clear understanding of students' diverse language needs. Arrangements for teaching and learning are carefully planned and well structured. The subject leader's candid and accurate evaluation of strengths and weaknesses informs regular reviews of action plans. Action is targeted accurately at the needs of different student groups. Data about students' progress are analysed rigorously and used constructively to identify further improvement. The subject leader regularly checks the accuracy of assessment and the quality and consistency of students' work. Highly committed staff work collaboratively and effectively to develop teaching and promote students' progress. Induction for new teachers provides good support and guidance.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the rigour of assessment at Key Stage 3
- further developing the teaching of letters and sounds.

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