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Mrs Baird  
Headteacher  
Solway Community Technology College  
Liddell Street  
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CA7 4DD

Dear Mrs Baird

### **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 17 and 18 October 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; observation of three lessons and short visits to a further four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

### **Achievement in English**

Achievement in English is good.

- Most students make good progress from a low starting point in Year 7. The rate at which students make progress in learning in English has improved in recent years.
- Taking account of all students' performance in English at GCSE in recent years, though attainment has fluctuated from year to year, it has been lower than the national average overall. However, attainment improved in 2011 with an increase in the number of students obtaining an A grade.
- Students generally do better at reading than writing and, for some, standards of spelling and handwriting are weak.
- Despite evident success in narrowing gaps in achievement, small pockets of underachievement remain mainly among students known to be entitled

to free school meals, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and boys.

- Students' progress is aided by their positive attitudes to learning English, their good behaviour in lessons and the positive relationships with teachers.

### **Quality of teaching in English**

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- Students' good progress confirms the effectiveness of the teaching. In the lessons seen the teaching was never less than satisfactory and much was good.
- The most effective teaching was rooted in strong knowledge of the subject. The work was carefully planned to extend students' skills and understanding progressively. All students were kept fully engaged in purposeful learning activities and skilful questioning led them to deeper understanding of texts. Consequently, the vast majority made good gains in their learning.
- Where teaching was satisfactory, students did not always have enough time to think or to develop their ideas through discussion; not all the activities in a lesson pushed learning on and some more able students were not sufficiently challenged.
- Teachers use a range of resources and methods to enliven lessons and to support students' learning.

### **Quality of the curriculum in English**

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- The curriculum in English covers all that is required and is appropriately balanced. It is tailored to meet the needs and interests of the students. Good attention is given to poetry and media.
- The curriculum for the first two years of Key Stage 3 (Years 7 and 8) is well-organised and planned in considerable detail so teachers are supported well to meet the needs of students in mixed-age groups. Curricular planning for Year 9, though satisfactory, is less well developed. The Key Stage 4 curriculum has been adjusted effectively to meet changed requirements.
- The school provides a range of effective programmes for lower attaining students and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The curriculum is enriched through educational visits, for example to the theatre.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in English**

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is good.

- Leadership and management in English have proved effective in raising achievement, improving teaching and providing good support for staff.
- Within the department, and at senior leadership level, there is a strong commitment to continuous improvement in provision in English and high aspirations for students' achievement. Rigorous analysis of evidence of attainment and progress is used to set appropriate development targets with clear measures by which to judge success.
- Changes in the English department this year present challenges for the leadership and management of the subject. The head of department now works only part-time and some of the English teaching, mainly in Key Stage 3, is undertaken by teachers whose specialisms are in other subjects.

**Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- ensuring continued improvement in attainment and students' progress, in particular:
  - raising attainment in writing, including spelling and handwriting
  - improving boys' progress
  - further narrowing the achievement gap that remains for some students
- developing the skills of non-specialist teachers to teach English and monitoring the effectiveness of their teaching
- developing the curricular planning for Year 9.

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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Pat Kime**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**