

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr K Peck
Headteacher
The Chase
Geraldine Road
Malvern
Worcestershire
WR14 3NZ

Dear Mr Peck

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 24 and 25 November 2010 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 pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of parts of eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is satisfactory.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is satisfactory.

- Attainment in English has been broadly average over the last three years as measured by the proportion of students attaining at least a C grade at GCSE, and well above average at A level where a very high proportion of students achieve the highest possible grades.
- Progress as measured by the contextual value-added measures has been satisfactory over the last three years from Key Stage 2 to 4. All student groups made similar rates of progress including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. In the sixth form, progress has been outstanding. From broadly average starting points, students have achieved outcomes at A level which are well above the national average.
- Standards in lessons seen were broadly average and above average in the sixth form. Progress was satisfactory overall. The school's own data

suggest that current Year 11 students are on course to reach standards above the national average by the end of Key Stage 4, having achieved similar standards on entry to the school. Most students join the school having attained broadly average standards in English at the start of Year 7.

- The large majority of students enjoy their learning in English because they find most lessons interesting and the very best exciting. Their learning is satisfactory but not all students are sufficiently challenged to do as well as they can.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory.

- Teaching observed during the inspection was satisfactory overall, although half of the lessons seen were either good or outstanding. Teachers work hard to produce lessons that will stimulate and engage students. They also give freely of their own time, including holidays, to provide additional help for students. Relationships between teachers, additional adults and students are very good. Teaching assistants are deployed well.
- In the very best lessons, the short, sharp activities interspersed with partner talk and group work keeps students on their toes as they exchange information with others or practise drama routines. There is a sense of pace and urgency in their learning. Students' own ideas are welcomed by teachers and students are prepared to challenge each other's views, for example interpreting sound effects or discussing the narrative of a film.
- In half of the lessons seen, students, including high-attaining groups, were working at a slow pace on activities which they enjoyed but which did not sufficiently challenge them. Although students are in ability sets for English, there are still variations in the attainment levels of students within each group and this is not sufficiently taken into account when planning lessons.
- Although students know their targets, very few know how well they are currently doing and they are not sufficiently informed how to achieve the next level or grade. Marking occasionally provides them with improvement points and within the department there is some outstanding practice, including students assessing their own and others' work, but it is not consistent. Marking is not always up-to-date and too often written feedback is limited to brief, uncritical comments.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- The school has a range of curriculum pathways in English, aimed at the needs and aspirations of different groups of learners. These include fast track groups taking GCSE in Year 10 and a film studies GCSE option in

Year 11 for those students who have already obtained English and English Literature at Grade C or above in Year 10.

- Each year group has a smaller class for lower-attaining students with additional support to ensure these pupils make similar progress to the rest of the school.
- Film studies and Theatre Studies are offered in the sixth form to complement English language and literature courses. There is a wide range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities for English including reading, writing and film clubs and trips to the theatre or poetry visits.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are satisfactory.

- Senior leaders and managers rightly value highly the hard work and commitment of the English department. The re-development of the accommodation demonstrates the school's high commitment to the subject.
- Although the department has a wealth of data on students, not enough is done to ensure, for example, that GCSE students on the C/D borderline are targeted to secure their C grades. In the most recent examinations, 48 students who had achieved the level expected for their age at the end of Year 6 missed out on a C grade in English in Year 11.
- Leaders reflect on and evaluate all aspects of the work of the department and are prepared to make changes, for example to courses and teaching groups to bring about improvements. GCSE targets for the next two years are aspirational and challenging. Monitoring, including joint lesson observations and work scrutinies by leaders, is a regular feature within the department.
- In a recent English departmental review, the school judged provision as outstanding and learning outcomes as good. Inspection evidence indicates that these judgements are overgenerous. While the school has identified a number of external factors to explain examination outcomes, it has not sufficiently addressed inconsistencies in teaching and assessment.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising the achievement of students at GCSE in English by ensuring:
 - teachers improve feedback to students about how well they are doing and how they can improve further
 - activities in lessons are planned more effectively to challenge different groups of students to accelerate their pace of learning
 - senior and middle leaders take greater account of students' learning outcomes when monitoring the effectiveness of teaching in lessons.

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. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Mark Sims
Her Majesty's Inspector