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Mr M Parker and Mr R Pilgrim  
Co-headteachers  
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Dear Mr Parker and Mr Pilgrim

### **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 21 and 22 February 2012 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 11 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

### **Achievement in English**

Achievement in English is good.

- Students' attainment is consistently above average by the end of Key Stage 4 and all groups of students make better progress in English than those nationally. In 2011, students made outstanding progress between Key Stages 2 and 4, which is an improvement on the previous year. Attainment at A level is slightly above the national averages and students are now making good progress.
- The vast majority of students have positive attitudes and engage well in English lessons. This is evident in the way in which they enjoy learning through discussion and their ability to settle quickly to individual work. Students apply their skills well in a range of written formats, demonstrate good reading skills and speak with confidence in formal and informal situations.

## **Quality of teaching in English**

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge, are enthusiastic about English and prepare very well for lessons. Good-quality questioning means that students of all abilities are supported well to develop their thinking and understanding. In the best teaching, students are encouraged to challenge and ask questions of each other. On occasions, opportunities are missed for students to be supported in developing as independent learners.
- Resources and learning activities are stimulating and promote students' enjoyment and progress. There are well-planned opportunities for students to use information and communication technology. Teachers are focusing on ways to support some Key Stage 5 students to transfer their good, and sometimes excellent, understanding of language and literature into high-quality written responses.
- Students receive high-quality feedback on their work. There are specific targets and opportunities for students to reflect on the marking.

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

The quality of the curriculum in English is outstanding.

- A significant strength of the curriculum is the school's active and successful promotion of wider reading and the ways in which the development of reading skills permeates the curriculum. Students in Key Stage 3 enjoy the structured reading lessons, held in the positive learning environment of the library. Those studying A level have reading journals which support their ability to make connections between texts. The strong emphasis on reading is balanced well with students' experience of writing and speaking and listening. There are also many opportunities for media and visual texts built into the curriculum.
- The school has effective transition arrangements with its partner primary schools. Students have good opportunities to apply their skills in joint cross-curricular working with the physical education and humanities departments. Progression of skills across the key stages is planned for in detail, meaning that students build on prior learning and apply that to different forms of writing and analysis of language and literature. The additional intervention to support those students with weaker English skills is valued and has a very good impact.
- A wide range of enrichment activities enhances students' experience and enjoyment of English. There are regular theatre trips, in-school theatrical and writing workshops as well as author visits. Reading and creative writing clubs are popular with students of different abilities and the Year 10 'Handling the News' enrichment day gives students the chance to work with journalists. Students' confidence and skills in speaking and listening are very well supported by public speaking and debating opportunities.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is good.

- A clear and purposeful vision for continued improvement has been established by the very effective subject leader. There is good shared leadership, with specifically delegated responsibilities. Individual teachers also show leadership in the regular and systematic sharing of good-quality resources and practice. Staff morale is high and teachers feel their views and experience are valued. Opportunities are available to observe some of the excellent practice although more of this work is likely to help teaching to become outstanding.
- Teachers have a passion for the subject and are committed to ensuring that students share this passion and achieve well. The impact of this can be seen in the positive GCSE results and increasingly good achievement in Key Stage 5. A particular strength is the promotion of wider reading for all groups of students.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and informs suitable plans for improvement. These plans have not, however, been focused sharply enough on the impact of the department's work. The school's systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching are good and feedback to teachers is shaped to identify how learning can be improved. Sophisticated monitoring of progress allows for timely and effective intervention.

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

- increasing the proportion of outstanding teaching and learning by:
  - ensuring that students in Key Stage 5 improve the quality of their written responses to texts
  - increasing all groups of students' resilience in being independent learners and extending the existing structures for sharing excellent practice in teaching.

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

**James McNeillie**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**