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Mr David Parker  
Principal  
Penrice Community College  
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Dear Mr Parker

### **Ofsted 2012–13 subject survey inspection programme: English**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 11 and 12 February 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; and observation of eight lessons.

### **The overall effectiveness of English is outstanding.**

#### **Achievement in English is outstanding.**

- Standards in English language at the end of Key Stage 4 are well above the average, as seen by the school's excellent GCSE results over at least three years. In 2010, the GCSE results in English literature dipped due to the precedence given to the rigorous development of English language skills. Inspection evidence confirms that attainment has recovered and that students in Year 11 are currently on track to achieve similarly high results to those in English language.
- Throughout the school, students make exceptionally strong progress in English from their different starting points. Those students that join the school with weaker literacy skills, including those with special educational needs, make rapid progress in lessons because important skills are taught systematically through highly-structured literacy programmes. All groups

of students, including those eligible for the pupil premium, achieve very well and most make much better progress than similar pupils nationally.

- In lessons, students demonstrate a keen enjoyment of literature, expressing their views in a mature and confident manner. Students collaborate very well on shared tasks. For example, in one lesson seen, Year 10 girls discussed earnestly in small groups whether Steinbeck used literary devices in 'Of Mice and Men' to indicate how the novel would end. Students readily take on additional responsibilities such as those of the 'literacy leaders' that mentor students in Years 7 and 8. These ambassadors build the younger students' confidence in English and ease their transition from the primary school.

### **Teaching in English is outstanding.**

- All the teachers in the faculty have a thorough knowledge of their subject and this leads to highly effective teaching. Teachers use assessment information well to plan demanding tasks that challenge students of all capabilities. In lessons, teachers' thorough knowledge of the texts enables them to question students incisively and adjust their teaching accordingly. Teachers have an excellent rapport with the students and use this to encourage an individual response to literature. The high quality relationships between teachers and students promote good and at times outstanding learning behaviour.
- Teachers use resources very effectively to deepen students' understanding of literature and develop the quality of their responses. In a Year 11 boys' set, for example, the students used 'Freytag's Pyramid' to identify the dramatic structure within Lively's 'The Darkness Out There' before applying it to a range of other texts. In this lesson, the students demonstrated an exceptional understanding of the dramatic events within the narrative. Similarly, in a Year 10 lesson, students used progressively more demanding writing frames to organise their written responses to a novel.
- Teachers provide students with detailed and informative feedback through marking, regular reviews and individual coaching sessions. On occasions, the marking of students' work is infrequent which leaves a few students unsure how to improve their writing. Students know their targets in English and have developed a good understanding of what is expected by checking their own work and that of others regularly. In a Year 11 lesson, for example, the students defined key words from different grade criteria before using the definitions to grade pieces of writing and provide written feedback to their peers.

### **The curriculum in English is good.**

- The recent change to a two-year Key Stage 3 curriculum provides a firm basis for developing English language skills and studying a progressive range of historical and contemporary texts. In Year 7, students are encouraged to apply their English skills in humanities subjects that are taught by the same teacher. Students in Key Stage 4 move successfully to single gender sets organised according to students' capabilities. The move

to a three-year Key Stage 4 is set to provide students with an opportunity to study texts in more depth. For example, students in Year 9 that have completed the core programme are beginning an extended study of Orwell's 'Animal Farm'. The school's inclusive approach to English provides additional support for students that have the potential and the desire to study for a GCSE in English literature. Consequently, a higher-than-average number of students enter for the exam.

- The recently refurbished library and study centre has substantially increased the number of books borrowed by students. The school provides a good range of enrichment opportunities including a weekly film club, creative writing club, scriptwriting club, cinema visits, local performances, entry to national competitions and participation in a news-reporting initiative.

### **Leadership and management of English are good.**

- The principal and senior leaders have ensured a rigorous and inclusive focus on raising students' achievement in English. They monitor the subject closely. Consequently, they have an accurate view of strengths and provide a clear direction for further improvement. This leads to a shared sense of purpose among faculty staff who speak passionately about developing students' reading, writing and communication skills through a study of literature.
- The head of faculty assisted by other leaders has monitored the quality of teaching and the promotion of literacy skills in other subjects. The Raising Attainment Plan for English lacks interim milestones and clear monitoring arrangements. Consequently, it is difficult for leaders to evaluate the faculty's progress towards its end-of-year objectives.

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

- ensuring that teachers implement the school's feedback policy consistently so that all students have a clear understanding of how to improve their work in English
- improving the faculty plan for improvement so that leaders may evaluate the faculty's progress towards end-of-year objectives more easily.

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

**Ian Hancock**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**