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Ms A Downey  
Principal  
ARK Putney Academy  
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Dear Ms Downey

### **Ofsted 2013–14 subject survey inspection programme: English**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 21 and 22 January 2014 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 nine lessons.

### **The overall effectiveness of English requires improvement.**

#### **Achievement in English requires improvement**

- Over time and from below average starting points, most students make at least expected or better progress in English. The gap between students eligible for pupil premium funding and others is narrow and closing. However, on average, students gained lower grades in their GCSE English examinations in 2013 than in the previous year and too few students achieved higher grades. Results for current Year 11 students who have been entered early indicate that achievement in English Language will improve in 2014.
- Although the proportion of students making good progress in Key Stage 3 is rising, particularly in Years 7 and 8, some low achieving students do not make the progress of which they are capable. Extra literacy support is helping targeted students in Year 7 to make better progress.

- There has been a steady decline in achievement in GCSE English Literature. In 2013, the percentage of students gaining grades A\* to C was significantly below the national average and was eleven per cent lower than in the previous year.
- Students make at least expected gains from their starting points in Key Stage 5, but the proportion of students who continue their English Literature courses from Year 12 to 13 is low. Half the students who started the AS English Literature course in 2012 did not continue to A level. Results at A level dipped in 2013.

### **Teaching in English requires improvement**

- The quality of teaching over time requires improvement. Current practice is stronger. English teachers are aware that progress across key stages needs to accelerate. They plan lessons carefully and provide effective resources to help students learn, including for those students who struggle. They mark work regularly and generally give students specific guidance on how to make improvements. However, there are some inconsistencies in teachers' expectations of the actions students should take to correct their work. As a result, students do not always make sustained or rapid progress.
- In the best lessons, teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve. They use questioning well to develop students' understanding. In a Year 10 English lesson, students were able to deepen their understanding of Macbeth's character through analysis of the 'dagger speech'. The tasks set by the teacher provided suitable challenge for different groups of students. They were given sufficient time to develop their responses in writing; this enabled them to develop their skills in preparation for formal examinations.
- In less effective lessons, teachers do not use the information they have about students' starting points to plan tasks at the right level of difficulty. Occasionally, the pace of learning moves at a pace which is too slow. As a result, a few students become less focused and do not always complete all of the work they are set.

### **The curriculum in English requires improvement.**

- Though the curriculum offers breadth and balance across the key stages, some units of work lack challenge, particularly for the more able. A full review of the academy's curriculum is currently underway. Leaders in the department are fully aware that revisions and updating are needed. Improvements have already been made to Key Stage 3 schemes of work.
- The importance of reading is well understood, but there is an inconsistent approach to developing students' skills and enjoyment of reading. Students say that they are encouraged to read, but some use their reading logs and others do not. They say that although they read in tutor periods, they are not given enough opportunities to talk about their books, or to enter competitions. Most students say that they use the library regularly.

They enjoy texts studied in class, such as 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time'.

### **Leadership and management of English require improvement.**

- The department has experienced considerable turbulence in staffing over the last year. The head of department, supported by the head of Key Stage 3, has provided decisive leadership during this period. Leaders accept that using a double entry approach for GCSE English in 2013 did not have the intended impact on improving attainment. The head of department has taken the decision to enter all current Year 11 students for the IGCSE, to ensure a more consistent approach.
- The head of Key Stage 5, who has recently returned to post, provides effective support to help teachers improve their skills. She has ensured that there is a sharp focus on those students who are underachieving. As a result, students are now making better progress.
- Department action plans and recommendations from a recent leadership review are focused on most of the urgent priorities for improvement. However, there is insufficient detail about which aspects of teaching require improvement, or how to raise students' achievement in English Literature.
- The recently appointed Principal has already set high expectations of what students can achieve. She has demonstrated a firm commitment to ensuring that teachers are held fully accountable for achievement, through rigorous analysis of information about students' progress.

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

- raising achievement in English and English Literature, ensuring that all groups of students make consistent progress across key stages
- strengthening departmental plans to ensure that the impact of measures to raise achievement, develop the curriculum and improve the quality of teaching is carefully monitored and evaluated.

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

**Russell Bennett**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**