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## Introduction

This booklet aims to help inspectors and staff in schools and colleges to evaluate standards and quality in English for students post-16. It complements the *Handbook for Inspecting Secondary Schools* (1999), the supplement *Inspecting School Sixth Forms* (2001) and the *Handbook for Inspecting Colleges* (2001). It replaces the earlier guidance *Inspecting Subjects and Aspects 11–18* (1999).

This guidance concentrates on issues specific to English. General guidance is in the *Handbooks*. Use both to get a complete picture of the inspection or evaluation process.

This booklet is concerned with evaluating standards and achievement, teaching and learning, and other factors that affect what is achieved. It outlines how to use students' work and question them, the subject-specific points to look for in lessons, and how to draw evaluations together to form a coherent view of the subject.

Examples are provided of evidence and evaluations from college and school sixth-form inspections, with commentaries to give further explanation. These examples are included without any reference to context, and will not necessarily illustrate all of the features that inspectors will need to consider. The booklets in the series show different ways of recording and reporting evidence and findings; they do not prescribe or endorse any particular method or approach.

Inspectors and senior staff in schools and colleges may need to evaluate several subjects and refer to more than one booklet. You can download any of the subject guidance booklets from OFSTED's website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

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OFSTED's remit for this sector is the inspection of education for students aged 16–19, other than work-based education. In schools, this is the sixth-form provision. In colleges, the 16–19 age-group will not be so clearly identifiable; classes are likely to include older students and, in some cases, they will have a majority of older students. In practice, inspectors and college staff will evaluate the standards and quality in these classes regardless of the age of the students.

This booklet concentrates on the most commonly found courses in or related to English for students 16–19. However, the principles illustrated in this guidance can be applied more widely.

The range of courses which you may be called upon to inspect as a specialist in English includes General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and Advanced Level (A-level) courses in English language, English literature and English language and literature and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) English. You may also be expected to inspect communication key skills.

English literature, English language and the combined English language and literature course have as a common starting point the work most students have done for GCSE English. Some students will have taken English literature GCSE courses in addition, but all who have taken GCSE English will have been taught to:

- use language confidently as speakers and writers;
- analyse language used for different purposes and in different contexts;
- read many kinds of text and make articulate and perceptive comments about them.

The knowledge, skills and understanding and breadth of study in speaking and listening, reading and writing form the substantial common experience for most students of these courses post-16.

The GCE A-level courses focus on the ability of students to communicate clearly their knowledge, understanding and insights, using accurate and coherent written expression. However, they move into significantly different specialist academic areas, with their own methods of study and specialist terms which students need to master, although some connections remain.

- Literature courses focus on the detailed study of a specified range of literature, encouraging students to interpret and respond to the works studied within the context of their composition and the ways in which others have understood them. They encourage breadth of reading and informed reflection on what is read.
- Language courses enable students to apply knowledge of the various frameworks for the study of language to the analysis of a wide range of texts, to understand how and why language varies and changes.
- The joint English language and literature courses combine aspects of each of these approaches. They are distinctive, however, in the emphasis placed on the analysis of style in spoken and written language – including both literary and non-literary texts – and the way such analysis influences the quality of work produced by students. Starting points can be students' own compositions (in speech or writing) or the reading of a text, but each will lead students to reflect on stylistic choices.

In each of these three courses, the teaching and assignments should be closely based on the assessment objectives spelt out in the subject criteria and repeated in each published specification. You need to be familiar with these objectives in order to evaluate the standards and progress of students and the quality of the teaching. Some objectives for A2 modules are different from those of AS modules, and indicate the progression intended as students move through the course. Each subject specification includes 'synoptic' modules which test all the assessment objectives together. You will need to see how students are being prepared for such assessments throughout the course.

The Advanced Extension Award (AEA) in English is aimed at the ablest students. It is open to those studying any of the three A-level courses above and does not involve additional specified content. It encourages students to acquire greater skills of enquiry, analysis and synthesis and to show their creativity, depth of understanding and enjoyment of English by their response to a selection of related, unseen texts on a particular topic.

GCSE work in post-16 provision shares the same criteria as GCSE English courses for Key Stage 4, though the content of reading passages and the topics for writing may be tailored to the interests and experiences of older students. Students may be repeating a qualification they have taken before in order to attain a higher grade (particularly C or above) or they may not have taken it before. In both cases, students may need to be given confidence, and skilful teaching is required. Where students are repeating the qualification, they will pursue objectives or content which are already familiar, and approaches need to be found to motivate them and secure their progress.

## Common requirements

All inspectors share the responsibility for determining whether a school or college is effective for all its students, whatever their educational needs or personal circumstances. As part of this responsibility, ensure that you have a good understanding of the key characteristics of the institution and its students. Evaluate the achievement of different groups of students and judge how effectively their needs and aspirations are met and any initiatives or courses aimed specifically at these groups of students. Take account of recruitment patterns, retention rates and attendance patterns for programmes and courses for different groups of students. Consider the individual goals and targets set for students within different groups and the progress they make towards achieving them.

You should be aware of the responsibilities and duties of schools and colleges regarding equal opportunities, in particular those defined in the Sex Discrimination Act 1957, the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. These Acts and related codes of practice underpin national policies on inclusion, on raising achievement and on the important role schools and colleges have in fostering better personal, community and race relations, and in addressing and preventing racism.<sup>1</sup>

As well as being thoroughly familiar with subject-specific requirements, be alert to the unique contribution that each subject makes to the wider educational development of students. Assess how well the curriculum and teaching in English enable all students to develop key skills, and how successfully the subject contributes to the students' personal, social, health and citizenship education, and to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Judge how effectively the subject helps prepare students aged 16–19 for adult life in a culturally and ethnically diverse society.

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<sup>1</sup> See Annex *Issues for Inspection arising from the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (Macpherson Report)* in *Evaluating Educational Inclusion*, OFSTED, 2000, p13.





## 1 Standards and achievement

### 1.1 Evaluating standards and achievement

From the previous inspection report, find out what you can about standards and achievement at that time. This will give you a point of comparison with the latest position, but do not forget that there is a trail of performance data, year by year. Analyse and interpret the performance data available for students who have recently completed the course(s). Draw on the school's *Pre-Inspection Context and School Indicator* (PICSi) report or, in the case of a college, the *College Performance Report*. Also analyse the most recent results provided by the school or college and any value-added information available. When numbers are small, exercise caution in making comparisons with national data or, for example, evaluating trends. For further guidance on interpreting performance data and analysing value added, refer to *Inspecting School Sixth Forms*, the *Handbook for Inspecting Colleges* and the *National Summary Data Report for Secondary Schools*.

Where you can, form a view about the standards achieved by different groups of students. For example, there may be data which enable you to compare how male and female students or different ethnic groups are doing, or how well 16–19-year-old students achieve in relation to older students.

Make full use of other information which has a bearing on standards and achievement, including success in completing courses, targets and their achievement, and other measures of success.

You should interpret, in particular:

- trends in results;
- comparisons with other subjects and courses;
- distributions of grades, particularly the occurrence of high grades;
- value-added information;
- the relative performance of male and female students;
- the performance of minorities and different ethnic groups;
- trends in the popularity of courses;
- drop-out or retention rates;
- students' destinations, where data are available.

On the basis of the performance data and other pre-inspection evidence, form hypotheses about the standards achieved, whether they are as high as they should be, and possible explanations. Follow up your hypotheses through observation and analysis of students' work and talking with them. Direct inspection evidence tells you about the standards at which the current students are working, and whether they are being sufficiently stretched. If the current standards are at odds with what the performance data suggest, you must find out why and explain the differences carefully.

In your observations, be alert to any differences in the standards of work of different groups of students.

Through their GCSE work in English, students starting on A-level courses should understand:

- how to use the vocabulary, structures and grammar of standard English fluently and accurately in formal and informal situations;
- how language varies;
- differences between speech and writing;
- current influences on spoken and written language;
- attitudes to language use;
- the development of English, including changes over time and the origins of words;
- the main features of sentence grammar and structure, including word classes and their grammatical functions;
- appropriate grammatical terminology, (eg nouns, verbs, adjectives, prepositions, conjunctions, articles).

The majority of students should be able to write for a range of purposes:

- to imagine, explore and entertain;
- to inform, explain and describe;
- to persuade, argue and advise;
- to analyse, review and comment.

They will also have read a range of literature, including Shakespeare, other drama, poetry and prose from a range of periods and cultures. In some cases, students will have studied English literature as a separate GCSE subject, but the English examination is designed to ensure that those who have come direct from GCSE work will have covered the range stipulated in the National Curriculum Programmes of Study.

Despite these common standards which characterise work at grade C and above at GCSE, there is likely to be considerable variation from student to student, particularly if the class contains older students or students from abroad. Teachers should be aware of these differences and provide accordingly. The introduction of the AS specifications has often led to increases in the size and diversity of first year English classes, with some students taking English as a fourth subject at this level. As a result, the need for teachers to match texts, tasks and teaching to the previous attainment and learning needs of students has increased in importance.

When judging standards in AS and A-level courses in English, concentrate particularly on the extent to which, in the context of the course they are studying, students:

- use spoken and written language with poise, accuracy, fluency and imagination;
- structure an argument or response logically, selecting appropriate evidence to support what they say or write;
- show mastery of a wide general vocabulary and of the specialist terms needed for the discussion of language or literature;
- are able to analyse and evaluate texts in detail, including those previously unseen, linking an understanding of their style and structure to meaning, purpose and context;
- show appreciation of, and response to, a wide range of resources, including (where appropriate) both spoken language and media productions;
- take increasing responsibility for their own learning, including reading widely beyond any set texts;
- understand and make discriminating use of background reading, such as biographical, critical, or contextual material, to support but not replace their own responses and interpretations.

Compare evidence from examination results with the evidence on standards of work you see in lessons, in the sample of work and from discussion with students.

## **1.2 Analysis of students' work**

Read a sample of the written work (or other evidence of attainment) from students currently on the courses being inspected. The sample needs to be representative of the range of students on the course in terms of attainment levels, gender and other characteristics of the year group. It should also enable you to follow up any issues you raised when you carried out your initial analysis of data. The analysis of work is important for judging the nature of the demands made on the students and their progress over time. Hence, it can give valuable insights into their achievement.

**Example 1: evidence from files of A-level English language students in an FE college: 2 higher-attaining students; 2 average-attaining students; 2 lower-attaining students.**

Very good coursework project from two average students with clear descriptive brief and a good-quality transcript of recorded material; one covers 'DJ speak', local radio disc-jockey language, the other a sports commentary, analysed for fluency, vocabulary and typical features. Methodical, clear work of evaluative strength. Some students' analyses of language in religion and in politics are less substantial, reasonably clear on description, with appropriate terminology, but less clear on analysis and evaluation. Higher-attaining student has an extremely well-researched study of the language used to represent women in the tabloid press, with perceptive analysis and good use of grammar framework to support evaluation of sentence types and sentence complexity. Also the use of slang and colloquial language and how tabloid press respond to 'political correctness'. Two lower attaining students' files have extremely well-researched notes on lexical and grammatical elements, with supportive comments from the teacher to consolidate understanding of active and passive sentences, style and syntax functions of suffixes, accent and dialect. One lower attaining student has an effective extended study (2,000 words) of language and discrimination – racism, sexism, ageism – and language that is likely to cause offence. The study is well organised and handles the linguistic and social discussion in clear, succinct prose; an indication of considerable progress over the course so far.

**[Attainment above average (3)]**

**Commentary**

High expectations of all students, particularly lower attainers, have resulted in above average attainment across a range of work. The evidence indicates good achievement, from the appropriate matching of tasks to students' learning needs, and the development of good research skills.

**Example 2: evidence from files of A-level English literature students in a school sixth form; 2 higher-attaining students; 2 average-attaining students; 2 lower-attaining students.**

*Files contain notes and drafts, research findings, essay plans, contributions to seminars and finished essays.*

*Higher-attaining students*

*Good critical vocabulary and fluent, sophisticated critical style, particularly on Wordsworth's poetic voice in Lyrical Ballads and Jane Austen's narrative voice in Persuasion. Good sustained reference to texts, showing careful and detailed reading. Notes for a seminar on nature in King Lear full and perceptive, again showing well-structured argument drawing intelligently on quotation. Male and female students achieving equally high standards. Comfortably attaining top grades, which in both cases represents good progress from GCSE.*

*Average students*

*Develop a clear line of argument, less clear in terms of personal ideas and responses, but some detailed critical interpretations, well handled, of a selection of material from John Donne and Andrew Marvell, with a genuine awareness of power of language, expressed in an accurate way. One student with English as an additional language shows good grasp of nuances of language and imagery in these complex poems. Indications of good progress over time.*

*Lower-attaining students*

*Have plenty of ideas about character in plays, but are less clear about impact and effect, particularly of prose, and find it difficult to get beyond incident and event. Some limitation on vocabulary, but technical terms usually handled successfully. Good progress for lower-attaining students, however, in extending reading skills to a range of types and genres – with sensitive reading of contemporary poetry in News for Babylon (ed Berry). Male student's answers rather less detailed than female's.*

*Nature of the work and progress during the course indicate good achievement in all cases.*

**[Attainment above average (3)]**

## Commentary

The good quality of students' reading and writing is evident throughout the sample of work analysed, with strengths in style and vocabulary in their critical writing. The good achievement of the lower-attaining students is seen in their gains in reading skills in this reading-intensive course.

In GCSE English, standards in speaking and listening, reading and writing should be assessed in the same way as those for Key Stage 4 pupils (see *Inspecting English 11-16*). Although the students are older, the expectations for standards should not be set higher.

### 1.3 Talking with students

Discussions with students complement what you see in lessons and what you learn from your analysis of a sample of their work. This extends your knowledge of students' skills and confidence in spoken language and in handling the specific vocabulary on the subject. In English language modules, these discussions provide particularly useful insights into individual coursework projects and students' capacity for independent work, though discussion needs to range across the wider content of the course too.

**Example 3: evidence from an interview with 6 A-level English language students in a school sixth form; chosen by the school to represent the range of attainment in the group.**

*Confident discussion of elements of the course. Students are able to illustrate and apply concepts from grammatical, lexical and semantic frameworks to explain how they have learned more about language since GCSE. Interesting definition and illustration of euphemism in language by average attaining student, with amusing reflections on rhyming slang. Extends into a more useful discussion of changed meanings over time – either pejoratively or positively (eg, 'silly', 'cunning', 'crafty', 'officious'), with reference to current uses of 'wicked'. On course for grade C – good achievement given previous GCSE grade. Good understanding, too, of how words take on new meanings (higher-attaining student offers 'metonymy' to sardonic comment from remainder), such as place for institution – Paris, Washington, Downing Street, The City.*

*Sustained interest in word origins and meanings. Discussion of coursework module shows students well aware of developing their own skills and how to find an appropriate style for a particular occasion and purpose, together with the need for the accompanying evaluation. Indicates significant development since GCSE. One student is analysing contemporary accounts of the Peterloo Massacre (1819) and producing a fictionalised radio documentary based on historical sources. Lower-attaining student has analysed beginner guides, and is producing a beginner's survival guide to mountain bikes and their use. For this student, on course for grade D, this is good progress and indicates that the student is achieving well. Higher attainer has analysed the work of Jacqueline Wilson and is writing fiction for children, while average attaining student is preparing material on a social issue, violence at football matches, in campaign leaflet and radio documentary form. Useful, wide-ranging discussion shows good levels of understanding of terminology for the study of language and coherent and effective spoken expression. Male and female students are performing equally here.*

**[Attainment above average (3)]**

## Commentary

The discussion provides a further insight into conceptual understanding and into the clarity of analytical thinking about language. The students' achievement appears good in view of progress from GCSE, and they show confidence in explaining the rationale for their individual work, with concrete subject detail. The above average levels of skill and understanding are clear.

**Example 4: evidence from interview with 6 A-level English literature students in a sixth-form college; volunteers, across the ability-range.**

*Good understanding from all the students of current Shakespeare text – King Lear – with a mature sense of dramatic structure and the significance of the fool, in the early scenes. All students have a good grasp of the nature of language and imagery in the play and of the parallel stories. High attainers can relate action to theme, idea and dramatic power more convincingly, however, and give their ideas succinct and accurate expression. Highest attainer able to talk about the way Lear has been received over time, mentioning the Tate version and the ‘unities’. He has been given supplementary reading by teacher and is to take AEA paper in English. He is being well challenged and is achieving well as a result.*

*Some difference of view on the qualities of Wordsworth’s Tintern Abbey, with the average and lower attaining students seeing little more than visual stimulus and some vague sentiments, but two higher attainers able to respond well to the power of the reflective verse form and the personal experience it contains. High and average attainers able to relate the ideas in the poem to those of Hartley on association and to Coleridge’s influence on Wordsworth. General agreement on a stimulating course, where there is always something fresh to do and where students’ opinions are valued, but no one is left struggling. Interesting insight from lower attaining student, that all the reading has stimulated her into writing of her own, and how positive and supportive the teachers have been in this. Confirms standards and quality seen in lessons, with above expected performance across the ability-range.*

**[Attainment above average (3)]**

**Commentary**

Here the attainment is above average in several respects. Firstly, the students are able to discuss the texts studied in an interesting range of ways: as drama, as evidence of the intellectual preoccupations of the period, and as a stimulus to their own writing, as well as for their literary qualities. Secondly, it is clear that the insights of students reflect their differing attainment levels, with the ablest students being appropriately challenged to read more widely in the history of literary criticism, and doing so with profit. Thirdly, all students have a good understanding of the language and imagery of the Shakespeare play studied, which is at the heart of the study of literature at this level.

**1.4 Lesson observation**

Wherever possible, organise your lesson observations around a range of different activities and approaches to the work, such as: exposition, explanation and interpretation by teachers; students’ presentations of ideas and concepts; seminar-style discussion and exchange of views; individual research projects and investigations; class or group close reading. Where students work as a group, try to identify the standards at which individual students are working. Use your knowledge of the composition of the class to distinguish between the standards reached by different groups of students.

**Example 5: evidence from an A-level English language lesson in a school sixth form; 18 students.**

**Researched material on origins of words in English, as part of a study of semantics. Teacher re-capitulates general definitions before students present findings.**

*All students in group, including the lower attainers, have a very secure grasp of the term ‘semantics’ and explain, in response to teacher’s questions, with good clear points: the study of the meaning of words and sentences, their connotations, denotations, implications and ambiguities. Good understanding too, at all levels, of ‘semantic fields’ (two average attaining students give illustrations from cooking and sport) and processes of semantic change. Effective consolidation to begin session, which gives students confidence in oral presentations. High standards of well-organised research and good use of language to explain and argue. Library facilities clearly well used for research. Higher attaining students explain original Anglo-Saxon word stock, with augmentations from French and Latin, and the national growth in words and new meanings for old words, eg, ‘mouse’ or ‘green’. They are achieving very well as a result of being appropriately challenged.*

*Very good presentation from two lower attainers (C and D at GCSE but now likely to reach grade C at A level – good progress). Their topic is loan words from French in the middle English period (eg, allegiance, revenue, tax, acquit, crime, judge, jury, justice, pardon), accompanied by a challenging thesis explaining why those words would reflect the social power of the Norman barons – language which reflects social power. Impressive insights, following good research which is clearly and effectively presented. Attainment at all levels well above average, particularly in their early units of the course.*

**[Attainment well above average (2)]**

### Commentary

Strengths here include the conceptual understanding and the use of terminology across the range of students in the group. There is clear evidence of good understanding by average students and the challenge of work for lower attaining students leads to very good progress for them in respect of their understanding. These are indications of very good achievement. The methods used (group presentation, discussion, question and answer, teacher explanations) all have a clear impact on standards.

**Example 6: evidence from an A-level English literature lesson in an FE college.**

**Whole class, discussing in groups, then sharing views, following the unseen reading of Shakespeare's sonnet 129: 'The expense of spirit is a waste of shame'.**

*Quick and competent awareness of sonnet form and its links to thought/idea sequences – patterns clear and good understanding of technical terms (quatrain, couplet, blank verse, 5-stressed line) which builds well on preceding learning and indicates good achievement. Power of language, in terms of accumulating adjectives and their rhetorical effect on the reader, picked up and illustrated by high attainers – with a pattern of parallels and opposites 'past reason hunted ... past reason hated.' Good insights into the tone of voice on the page – challenges from two relatively quiet students – is this really an experience or is it a clever game with words? Level of sophistication above that usually seen. Good conceptual grasp here of the implication of form and language. Most of group have B or C at GCSE and have made very good progress to reach this point. All students use sonnet for detailed reference to ideas. Well-developed sense of where the evidence for a view is. One female student rejects what she sees as 'macho self-indulgence' in the sonnet. Challenged by others on grounds of dramatic impact achieved. Significant critical insights emerge from the whole group, expressed in a fluent and cogent vocabulary,*

**[Attainment well above average (2)]**

### Commentary

The quality of the discussion, with confident handling by students of form and complex language, makes it clear that attainment is well above average. The influence of the higher attaining students in the group in establishing and generating levels of thinking and response is reflected in vocabulary and concept across the range of ability. Progress since GCSE suggests very good achievement.

**Example 7: evidence from an A-level English language lesson (12 students) in a school sixth form.**

**Homework reading, followed by class discussion led by the teacher: Orwell's essay Politics and the English Language, in terms of writer, reader, subject matter, representation etc.**

*Poor levels of understanding of the concept of writer and reader. Students started the course with GCSE grades A to C, but they are unable to distinguish features of Orwell's attitudes and values from the text, despite obvious pointers such as, 'staleness of imagery', 'phrases tacked together like the sections of a pre-fabricated hen house' and 'an increase in slovenliness and vagueness'. The engagement with detail seems not to have improved over the course from GCSE standard. There is little close reading of Orwell's view of politics and some superficial generalisation even from students with highest predicted grades – eg, 'Orwell was left-wing', whereas Orwell actually writes, 'In our time, political speech and writing are largely the defence of the indefensible'. Students are pressed to consider the linguistic*

features of what Orwell presents as bad English, but are not able to use linguistic terms, developed earlier in the course (eg, figurative language, word classes, verb forms, lexical semantic patterns). In their evaluation and analysis, poor levels of linguistic description, explanation and interpretation. Very little sense, for any student, of how the reader is influenced by the essay's purpose and subject matter. Attainment well below average; with two lower attaining students completely confused and working at well below pass level. This suggests poor achievement, in view of GCSE grades.

**[Attainment well below average (6)]**

**Commentary**

Low standards are clearly rooted in poor reading skills and poor understanding of key terms for this area of study. Some major issues emerge here – about developing the understanding of concepts fully and applying them later in the course. Low standards are also related to students' poor capacity for intellectual effort and thinking for themselves.

**Example 8: evidence from A-level English literature lesson in an FE college.**

**Teacher-led exposition/discussion of Hamlet Act 3 Scene 2 (Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Hamlet, after the play scene).**

Poor understanding by students of dramatic structure and tension, with confusion about events and who was who and what had happened. Little engagement with momentum of the play and why Claudius' guilt was significant, as factor for audience reaction. Little personal response in the group – waiting to be told what to think – and some significant misunderstanding about why Hamlet talks as he does to R and G – taking seriously Hamlet's comment 'My wit's diseased'. Very limited understanding, even by the higher attaining students, of the speech 'You would play upon me, you would seem to know my stops' – with a few unsupported comments about Hamlet's psychological problems. No spirit of enquiry here: no-one asks what 'these pickers and stealers' are. The role of R and G is only seen at face value: Hamlet's friends, uncompromised. Poor reading and response, poor understanding.

Since these students started the course with average levels of attainment this indicates poor achievement.

**[Attainment well below average (6)]**

**Commentary**

There are specific shortcomings in understanding and response. The levels of reading and understanding reflect superficial or facile assumptions about major dimensions of the text. Independent thinking and response are not evident, though the previous attainment of students suggests they would be capable of this – hence poor achievement it seems, as well as low levels of attainment.

**Example 9: evidence from AS-level English language and literature lesson in a school sixth form (8 students). One student had grade C at GCSE; the others had grade A or B.**

**The class has looked at some 'miscarriage of justice' cases on the Internet in order to examine the language used in such reports. The class discusses these reports and then students begin work, first in pairs, on their own reports, based on the miscarriage of justice associated with Justine in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which is a set text for the course.**

The students have been introduced to a large number of new terms and reviewed some from GCSE, including 'viewpoint', 'narrative voice', 'lexis', and 'modifiers'. The two highest attainers use these confidently and accurately as they discuss the Internet examples they have found. Most others are somewhat tentative in their introduction of most of this specialist vocabulary into their comments. However, three manage to make pertinent observations on the perspective of the reports and some of the more obvious linguistic indicators. This represents average attainment at this stage. Two lower attainers misunderstand what has been asked for, and their contributions merely describe what the reports say. They do not analyse the language in as much detail as they should by this point in the course.

*In their pairs, where the teacher deliberately links lower and higher attainers, the quality of discussion is good. Students listen well to each other and show a good understanding of the text read as well as beginning to analyse their own choices of language for their draft reports, using the framework and terms derived from the earlier task. However, the draft writing includes minor errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar, not all of which stem from haste. Overall attainment is about average, but considering the students' previous attainment this looks like unsatisfactory achievement.*

**[Attainment average (4)]**

**Commentary**

This is a case where, in view of the students' previous attainment, average attainment suggests less than expected progress and unsatisfactory achievement. The two highest attaining students are very readily able to adopt an analytical stance, use frameworks and terminology well, and apply these to an evaluation of their own writing. Most students still lack confidence, although they are able to make progress in analytical skills and their application, particularly when supported by each other or the teacher. A minority remain unable to adopt the analytical approach required. There is some evidence that written language accuracy may be rather below average but that spoken language is well used.



## 2 Teaching and learning

### 2.1 Evaluating teaching and learning

Note carefully the previous attainment of students on the A-level courses you are inspecting and assess how carefully the school or college has prepared for a diversity of potential candidates. Most students will normally have obtained at least a grade C in English, but this is not an essential pre-requisite and the range of previous attainment may be considerable. It is important that those responsible for the teaching can tell you how they plan for a range of previous attainment and experience and how different groups of students (students with special educational needs, students with English as an additional language, students with grades below C in GCSE English, or very able students, for example) are specifically targeted and supported.

Interpret the *Handbook* criteria with specific reference to English subjects, and keep in mind the characteristics of effective teaching and learning, in which:

for English language

- the students develop good knowledge and understanding because of the teacher's knowledge of the major frameworks for the systematic study of English language; the characteristic speech sounds and patterns; the vocabulary of English including origins, meanings and usage of words; the form and structure of words, sentences, texts in speech and writing; the ways meanings are constructed and interpreted; variation in language according to context, including social and personal factors (*subject knowledge, methodology*);
- the teacher's ability to teach the key features (phonetics, phonology, morphology, sentence grammar, semantics, pragmatics and text structure) and capture the interest of the students, leading them to see their relevance to an understanding of language (*subject knowledge, methodology, organisation*);
- students are encouraged to express themselves in speech and writing with confidence and sophistication, so that they can describe, explain and interpret (*methodology, assessment, expectations*);
- the use of a wide range of texts supports the development of students' capacity to respond perceptively to the varieties of English they hear and read (*resources, methodology, expectations*);
- a high level of expectation leads students to develop the appropriate critical and investigative skills of independent research into language (*methodology, resources, expectations, assessment*);
- the teacher's enjoyment stimulates in students an enjoyment in the study of language and its uses (*methodology, subject knowledge, expectations*);

for English literature

- the use of a wide range of texts develops in students a wide-ranging knowledge of fiction, poetry, plays and other writing, so that they show a fluent and authoritative command of them from at least the 17<sup>th</sup> Century to the present day (*subject knowledge, resources, planning*);
- the teacher's good subject knowledge leads students to a knowledge of the significance of cultural, historical, social and other contextual influences on literary texts and study (*subject knowledge, resources, planning, methodology*);
- the teacher ensures that students know how texts have been interpreted over time and the range of critical approaches that can be adopted (*subject knowledge, expectations, methodology*);
- the teacher's high expectations lead students to develop an extensive critical and specialist vocabulary, appropriate to literary study (*subject knowledge, expectations, methodology, assessment*);
- through the teacher's high expectations, students develop the ability to explain and clarify the relationships and comparisons between texts (*methodology, expectations*);

- the teacher's support and encouragement help students to be successful in developing their powers of spoken and written expression and, in particular, to use vocabulary and style which are mature, technically accurate and suited to the needs of analysis and criticism (*assessment, methodology, expectations*);
- the teacher's own interest and enthusiasm for literature stimulates students to read widely and so to develop independent opinions and judgements through their sustained investigation of texts (*expectations, resources, methodology, subject knowledge*);

for English language and literature

- the main features of each of the above lists are present;
- the teacher's skill in applying and explaining linguistic and stylistic analysis of speech and writing enriches students' appreciation of language and texts (*subject knowledge, methodology, organisation, resources*);
- the teacher's own interest and skill in writing engage the students, and encourage their writing and critical insight (*subject knowledge, methodology, expectations*);
- the teacher's sensitivity as a consultant helps students to develop as writers, providing structure, suggestion and correction but also allowing them to experiment and find their own 'voice' and critical response (*subject knowledge, assessment, methodology*);
- the teacher's high expectations lead students to make increasingly independent and informed choices as readers and writers (*expectations, organisation, planning*).

Good teaching of GCSE English will take particular account of the different ability levels and previous experience of the students. It will find ways of motivating students who may be repeating a course in which they feel they have not been successful or who may be new to this type of course. It will be planned to make best use of the limited amount of time available (usually just nine months, from September to May).

## 2.2 Lesson observation

Observing lessons is the major source of evidence for evaluating the quality of teaching and learning.

### **Example 10: evidence from A-level English language lesson in a sixth-form college.**

**Teacher-led discussion, following students' homework research on aspects of variation in language – standard English, accent, dialect, international variation and social variation.**

*Enthusiastic response by students, showing good draft definitions, is related to homework task of defining standard English (SE) and issues of accent and dialect. Students are well informed on idea of SE as a variety of English; reflecting good subject knowledge from teacher. They are able to indicate the linguistic features in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and vocabulary. Teacher adds an important dimension of prestige attached to SE – and social consequences for high standing associated with language use. Teacher challenges students – 'Is it true to say that standard English is the English used by the powerful?' Good, energetic debate on this, with discussion of language used by a country's institutions such as parliament, the law, the media – and pressure for SE in education. As part of SE, students support not only social standing but a need to be widely understood. Issues then arise of SE spoken with a non-standard accent. Is there a 'pure' SE? Two lower-attaining students make use of bad/good English in this context and suggest whether SE is used between friends and intimates. Teacher provides good working definition of accent to conclude this part of the lesson. Students have researched and collected differences between British English and American English as further evidence of language variation. Difference in spelling, in pronunciation and in meaning – good examples from TV/film of different stresses between the two, as in 'address', 'advertisement', 'cigarette', 'weekend', 'frontier' – and some interesting features of a 'semantic field' (teacher's phrase). Where there are differences – cars/automobiles, bonnet/hood, windscreen/windshield, boot/trunk, rear light/tail light, number plate/license plate. Energetic session which works all students at high levels of interest and understanding.*

**[Teaching and learning very good (2)]**

### Commentary

The teacher's very good knowledge and understanding, combined with high challenge and expectation, have a clear and direct impact on what students know and do. The quality of the learning is also a result of the detailed planning and structure of the session, with attention to inclusiveness and a good match of stimulating materials to students' capacities. The quality of learning, and the energy and enthusiasm of the students, also provide evidence of very good achievement.

**Example 11: evidence from an A-level English language and literature revision class in an FE college; mainly mature students.**

*The teacher introduces to the students some carefully selected letters of John Keats. This is done creatively on well-printed worksheets as 'coffee-time reading for when they had a minute or two' – a little cup and saucer steam in the corner of the pages! The students are intrigued. They read the letters and become very interested. The teacher then asks them to link the themes they have found in the letters with similar themes they have identified in his poems, studied earlier in the course. A good pace keeps the lesson moving as students call out favourite poems. The whole class looks closely at each in turn and identifies where the themes occur. During the ensuing discussion, the students use sophisticated technical language accurately when responding to the teacher's probing. They also make valid links with other literature they have studied. The lesson is very successful in revising and reinforcing much of the students' previous learning and, at the same time, in developing new insights and understanding.*

**[Teaching and learning very good (2)]**

### Commentary

The revision is made interesting and stimulating and the students are stretched and challenged to make sophisticated links between different aspects of literature. The confident handling of linguistic terms and complex themes is demonstrated in the high standard of the students' responses.

**Example 12: evidence from an A-level English literature lesson in an FE college.**

**Teacher-led discussion on the opening two chapters of Dickens' Bleak House – qualities, structure, purpose and style.**

*Teacher presents a good blend of the general and the particular, the characteristics of the way a novel begins, its specific style and vocabulary and how it makes an impact. This shows skilled subject knowledge, which has an immediate impact on students' understanding and their ability to make connections on a thematic level. Hence the fog and the workings of the law are placed together in the readers' understanding and careful, well-targeted questions draw out the patterns of the chapter. Students' responses are alert – patterns of expression noted and good cogent explanations offered for the reasons why a writer might make a particular emphasis. A good open question 'What do we now know?' produces energetic and detailed responses from all, even the least experienced readers. It develops good critical confidence and an appetite for further reading. Students tackle the Lady Dedlock chapter with confident and detailed responses to tone, atmosphere and style. Significant extension of reading skills throughout the session. Teacher is able to steer discussion well to lead to progress for students of both genders and for different attainment levels. Thus female students' insights into Lady Dedlock's character well drawn out for the benefit of all, while high attaining male students show flair in working out the significance of the fog/law imagery. While questions help lower attainers to understand the vocabulary and imagery, the teacher is also pushing the high attainers to place the chapters in the context of their wider reading about Dickens and Victorian London.*

**[Teaching and learning good (3)]**

### Commentary

The teacher had good specialist knowledge. Her skill in asking questions at the right time extends the students' confidence and response and their appetite for more of the novel. The teaching makes a good level of challenge and demand on the students.

**Example 13: evidence from an A-level English language lesson in a school sixth form.**

**Teacher and group of 12 students discussing language acquisition before creating an example of ideas on language acquisition – in a common form for such a debate (eg, article for a magazine or short radio talk).**

*Teacher's subject knowledge too hazy and anecdotal, with unsystematic teaching that lacks a clear structure – tends to support language as acquired without much intervention and does not make clear the complexity and stages of the process. Transcript of child (4 ½) relating a seaside visit is potentially useful, but does not focus sufficiently on features of child's grammatical skills or the need to sort some basic grammar points, such as 'knowed' for 'knew' – or what such usage indicates. Steps in grammatical growth not distinguishable or supported, in terms of evidence for students to use in an article.*

*A worksheet of a baby's first 50 words at 12 months again prompts little from students, nor are any patterns perceived in the record of a two-year-old's two-word sentences; poor challenge from teacher here. No focus in discussion on two-word utterance stage – 'cat jump', 'shut door', 'mummy off' – particularly on the basic emergence of word order, which would be an important insight. 'Pre-positional lift-off' mentioned but comes over as unrelated jargon without sufficient specific instances or examples. Session concludes without an overview of when the process of language acquisition begins, the signs of comprehension and interaction, and the key parental role – reasonably useful. Thin evidence for an article or programme and limited guidance, even at such an early stage, on how such a piece should be organised and what language and structure it should follow.*

**[Teaching and learning unsatisfactory (5)]**

**Commentary**

The good potential of the material here founders on the teacher's inadequate understanding and organisation of it. This has an immediate impact on students' coherent grasp of the factors involved. The use of good material, with insufficient expertise to promote demanding work, may be a wider feature of the teaching in general, particularly if teachers are new to the course, or the course itself has been recently introduced.

**Example 14: evidence from an A-level English literature lesson in an FE college.**

**Group discussion and sharing of points emerging: John Clare's Remembrances.**

*Poor context established for this work, with no specific focus for the group task, and insufficient social and autobiographical background to alert students to the impact of social and economic change on a writer. Poor handling by students of technicalities – and uncertainties as to what to make of the rhyme and stanza structure. Insufficient support from teacher to create a framework for the reading. Some superficial reading too readily accepted and a lack of awareness of the pattern of loss and dispossession and the depth of personal feeling. The discussion loses direction and the poem is generally dismissed in consequence. Students show poor ability to engage with the text and to read closely to explore the writer's blend of feeling and form. Teacher is too ready to accept negative personal response as the end of the story, and does not try to show the positive qualities of the verse. There is no concluding overview from the teacher and his uncertainties fail to establish critical energy and direction in the time available.*

**[Teaching and learning poor (6)]**

**Commentary**

Lack of clear purpose and much superficial drifting, with poor use of time, mark this out as poor teaching, with a corresponding impact on the development of students' knowledge and understanding. It has some of the signs of ill-thought-out planning and, when matched to insecure subject knowledge about the particular poet, the shortcomings are clear. This can often happen in whole-class criticism sessions if the teacher does not have a secure conceptual and technical grasp and fails to prepare sufficiently.

**Example 15: evidence from a Year 12 AS English language and literature class in a school sixth form; 23 students; early in the first term of the course.**

**Studying the 'Language production' module, which concentrates on the way audience and purpose relate to the linguistic choices made by speakers and writers.**

The class has previously been given Tennyson's 'Dark house by which once more I stand', from In Memoriam to discuss in groups. Extracts from the discussions have been transcribed. Here the students are given these transcripts alongside several extracts from published literary criticism (eg, T S Eliot). They are asked to contrast the spoken and written 'discussions' of the poem in groups. Plenary discussion follows, and then students are set an individual task, to be completed as homework. This is to use both their previous discussion and the published critics to create a page for a Key Stage 3 English textbook, to introduce this poem to pupils.

The first part of the session is over-ambitious in its aims, attempting too much too quickly for this group. Most of the class have gained B or C grades at GCSE, but their discussion of the poem in the taped transcripts is relatively superficial, with little real engagement with the style and structure of the poem. They also struggle somewhat with the language of some of the published criticism, with a few clear misunderstandings shown. The teacher, who is newly qualified, realises this and deals well with the misunderstandings. She provides useful encouragement during the group discussion and leads the plenary discussion of the differences between spoken and written language quite well. She is knowledgeable and clear about the points she wants to emerge from the discussion but, to move it on to lexis (including specialist terms) and grammar, she has to prompt a great deal, as students do not yet have a basic framework for analysis. With her guidance some key points emerge, and greater depth of analysis is shown by four higher attaining students.

The task of recasting the material for a new purpose and audience is carefully chosen to reflect the assessment objectives of the course. The students need more models of the language of such textbooks, and rather more teaching on the main stylistic features of the poem, to produce good writing of their own. The teacher is quick to realise this and begins to select some coursebook pages to show to the students, who are clearly struggling. By the end she reverts to plenary discussion on the main points which need to be made for the Key Stage 3 pupils as audience for the writing. Students' contributions here show that six higher attainers are beginning to grasp both the stylistic and the content choices needed and to understand the richness of the poem. Average attainers, the majority, are making satisfactory progress, at least with the style. Three lower attainers are becoming less confused and respond positively to the offer of extra help at lunchtime with the task.

**[Teaching and learning satisfactory (4)]**

### Commentary

This example shows a new teacher still coming to terms both with a new specification and with the previous attainment level of the group. There are strengths in the detailed planning of the activities to match the assessment objectives, the flexibility shown by the teacher in seeing where changes to her plan are needed, and her good subject knowledge. However, these must be set against the complex lesson structure and the fact that the pitch of the lesson and initial task was too ambitious. The teacher retrieves the situation, and learning clearly does occur, particularly for the high attainers. On balance, learning and teaching are satisfactory.

**Example 16: evidence from a GCSE lesson in an FE college; 4 students (all male) who did not retake in November, as they were not considered to be ready.**

The lesson begins with a reminder about the re-submission of coursework. Then the teacher and students look at a past paper, as a reminder of the argument essay task. Discussion of key features of technique, with teacher writing on whiteboard – covers planning, awareness of other viewpoint, logical structure of argument and key words. Very useful review at level students can grasp, with teacher giving good examples. Topic of conscription then chosen by teacher for class to prepare an essay collaboratively. Well selected, as two students and teacher have experience of service life. Arguments for and against rehearsed very effectively, summarised on whiteboard and copied down by students.

*Students' vocabulary in discussion is limited, and they often struggle to find the term they need, though written work in files shows that a grade C is possible for all in terms of accuracy. Teacher concentrates on deliberate enrichment of vocabulary, by mentioning synonyms, antonyms, derivations and related forms in a lucid way (eg, defence, defensive, offensive). She guides discussion very well, summarising main points, prompting the students' thinking with probing questions and encouraging them to expose contradictions. Planning and logical reasoning are both being well scaffolded in the approach taken. A good essay plan emerges, which is to be written up in essay form for homework. Atmosphere and relationships good. The group learns a great deal in the time, and all stay on task. Excellent management of a potentially difficult group.*

**[Teaching and learning very good (2)]**

**Commentary**

Although the group is very small, it is a challenge to motivate and secure progress in such a class. Here an experienced teacher draws well on her knowledge of the students to select a topic on which they have views and carefully targets the building of vocabulary and oral confidence as stepping stones to improved writing. The students need to find their own voice and marshal arguments to succeed here, and the lesson is very well framed to help students in these areas.

**Example 17: evidence from a GCSE English literature lesson in a general FE college; lower attaining students.**

**Teacher introducing a Shakespeare play to the class for the first time.**

*Very good method of capturing students' attention and interest. Begins the lesson by asking the students if any of them have ever been told by a gypsy or a fortune teller that something was going to happen to them which subsequently came true. Many students give examples. The teacher then asks them if they read their horoscopes in newspapers or magazines. The majority do, but two are scornful of taking any notice of them.*

*Pairs of students are given the horoscope page from a daily newspaper. They are asked to choose a horoscope and then write a short paragraph explaining how it could affect someone's actions if they felt that what the horoscope said might come true. The students work purposefully. A selection of the completed paragraphs is read out. The students' interest is maintained.*

*Then the teacher plays a video clip of the scene from Macbeth in which Macbeth meets the witches and is told that he will become Thane of Cawdor and later king. The students readily see the connection between this and the work they have done on horoscopes – how will Macbeth react after hearing these prophecies? Their interest is aroused. They make some perceptive comments in response to well-judged and probing questions from the teacher – eg, they suggest that Macbeth will try to make himself king. They want to know what happens and are keen to read on.*

**[Teaching and learning very good (2)]**

**Commentary**

An imaginative approach is very successful in engaging the students' interest by beginning with something very familiar to them and using this to help them to understand something which they have not experienced before. The result is that they are well motivated to read the play. A variety of oral and written skills is being developed within the session – listening, reasoning, explaining, summarising and describing. Students work purposefully and their responses demonstrate very good learning.

### 2.3 Other evidence on teaching and learning

Lesson observation is usually the most important source of evidence on the quality of teaching and learning, but the analysis of work and discussions with students can also yield valuable information. This is particularly important when the work includes a coursework component undertaken over time. Under these circumstances, the observation of individual lessons may give a very partial picture of the students' learning experiences and of the support provided by teachers.

The work analysis will give you a good feel for the overall rate of progress, and, therefore, the pace of the teaching and learning. It will show the range and depth of the work which the students are required to do. For example, it will show whether students are introduced to a sufficiently broad range of texts and whether they are expected to analyse them in the fine detail required at A level. It will indicate whether they are taught the full range of terms needed for such analysis.

Discussions with students will give you a sense of their motivation and the range of their experiences. You can ask questions to show whether they understand clearly how well they are doing and what they must do to improve.





### 3 Other factors affecting quality

Other factors are only significant if they have a noticeable impact on standards, teaching and learning. Note and evaluate any significant features of the curriculum, leadership, management, staffing, accommodation or resources. The following are examples of considerations specific to English.

#### Resources

Consider how effective the library is in supporting independent learning and research in English language and the extensive reading demands – beyond the set books – of English literature courses. For literature students, it is likely to be beneficial if the stock includes literary history, criticism and theory and a challenging range of contemporary fiction and poetry. The library may also provide ready access to the Internet, with self-study materials designed to help students to access relevant websites. Libraries can provide a forum whereby students' own fiction and poetry (an important dimension of advanced literary study) can reach a wider audience. If there is a wide variety of audio/visual recording facilities available for study and transcription, this is likely to have a positive impact on the work of language students.

#### Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the department may impact directly on the richness of students' experiences and the consequent standards they reach. The sense of an active reading and writing community, led and influenced by enthusiastic teachers, is often an important ingredient in raising students' expectations and creating the conditions for literary and language study to thrive. Enrichment activities provided, for example, by poets in residence, drama workshops or theatre visits can enhance the students' experience and broaden their understanding and appreciation. Evidence of ways in which staff continue to build their own subject knowledge and demonstrate their own interests as readers, writers, actors or theatre goers can be very relevant in judging the effectiveness of overall English provision.



## 4 Writing the report

The following is an example of a post-16 subject section from a sixth-form college inspection report. (It does not necessarily reflect the judgements in any or all of the examples given elsewhere in this booklet.) The summative judgements in these reports use, for schools, the seven-point scale: *excellent*; *very good*; *good*; *satisfactory*; *unsatisfactory*; *poor*; *very poor*. For colleges there is the five-point scale: *outstanding*; *good*; *satisfactory*; *unsatisfactory*; *very weak*. The summative judgements *excellent/very good* used in school reports correspond to *outstanding* in colleges; *poor/very poor* used in schools correspond to *very weak* in colleges.

### English

Overall, the quality of provision is **outstanding**.

#### Strengths

- Recent results in the AS and A-level courses have been consistently well above the national average.
- Students' achievement is very good; they reach high standards in writing and handle the terminology of literary criticism and linguistics effectively.
- Teaching is very good, with teachers knowing their subject very well and having a good understanding of their students' learning needs.
- Students learn very well; they are very good at working together both in pairs and in larger groups.
- The subject is led and managed very well.

#### Areas for improvement

- A minority of teachers give insufficient attention to students' own prose style in their marking.
- Some students need to develop their range of reading further.

#### Scope of provision

The provision in English caters for some 180 students. GCE AS and A2 courses are offered in English language, English literature and English language and literature. GCSE English is offered as a re-sit course, mainly for students on GNVQ courses who wish to improve their grades.

#### Standards and achievement

Standards achieved in GCE AS and A-level examinations are high. They have been well above the national average for the last three years and have maintained the high standard seen at the last inspection. Students do very well, considering their qualifications on entry. The proportion of students achieving grades A\*–C on GCSE English courses is in line with the national average; most students achieve an improvement of one grade or more. Retention rates are above average and attendance is good.

The observation of work during the inspection confirms these standards. In English literature, students' attainment is well above average, particularly in debate, analysis and explanation. Students reach high standards in extended, critical writing, and make effective use of the language of literary criticism. They are encouraged to develop and express a personal response to literature. By the second year, they have established an independent critical and personal voice in their writing. Reading skills are highly developed in the interpretation and evaluation of literary texts. On advanced language courses, students successfully employ linguistic concepts to analyse written and spoken language. Many students produce research projects of a high standard. In one particularly good example, a student analysed patterns of language in her own family, whose members speak Bengali and English.

The achievement of AS and A-level students is very good. Students of all abilities respond to the quality of teaching with energy and creativity. They work at full stretch and demonstrate effort, concentration and persistence. There is no significant difference between the work of male and female students. Most GCSE students work hard to improve their skills, but a few show little involvement with the activities in lessons.

### Quality of education

The teaching of A-level English is very good. Teachers know their subject very well, demonstrating a blend of scholarship and awareness of students' learning needs. Teaching enables students to draw from a wide range of materials and cultures. Planning is meticulous, particularly of the carefully structured stages in lessons. The pace of lessons is challenging; expectations are high and this leads to rapid progress in the development of students' skills. The teaching encourages different forms of intellectual enquiry and students often follow their own lines of research, frequently using the Internet to good effect. One group of students, including two whose families come from the Thembu people, explored the influence of Shakespeare on the education of intellectuals such as Nelson Mandela. Very good use is made of targeted questions to reinforce learning. The skills of close reading and interpretation of Shakespeare and other texts are taught in lively 'workshop' discussion sessions. For example, the success of these methods was conspicuous in a second year lesson which prompted sharp insights into Hamlet's psychology. In A-level language lessons, teachers provide a solid foundation to the understanding of linguistics. This enables students to develop confidence in identifying and interpreting examples from their own reading and observation. Teaching in GCSE English is lively and well paced, but does not always pay sufficient attention to including all students. Consequently, a few of the more passive ones could be stretched more.

Students work effectively together in pairs and small groups, as well as in dramatic interpretations and whole-class seminars. Literature students make good use of an 'independent learning journal' to record their responses to works they have studied for themselves. By contrast, some students need to develop their range of reading further.

There is prompt and constructive evaluation by teachers of students' ideas, whether in speech or writing. While most teachers make extensive written comments on students' work to help them improve, a minority give insufficient attention to students' own prose style in their marking.

There is good support for learning outside timetabled lessons. Students can attend a 'drop in' English workshop once a week for additional help with their studies. Those with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia receive effective individual support. All students on GCE AS courses are set minimum target grades for English, based on their GCSE grades. Progress is reviewed twice a term through personal tutorials. Students feel well supported, and particularly value the willingness of staff to talk to them outside lessons. Courses are enriched by trips to the theatre and talks from visiting speakers.

Teachers are well qualified and experienced. Teaching is accommodated in a dedicated suite of rooms, with ready access to video players and other equipment which is well used. There is an excellent library of resources developed by teachers, including course-related materials on the college intranet. The learning centre supports students' work effectively both through the extensive fiction collection and through ready access to the Internet. However, a wider range of books on biography, literary history, literary criticism and linguistics is needed to meet the demands of recent changes of specification.

### Leadership and management

The leadership and management of English are very good. Staff collaborate closely to share good practice and maintain high standards. Regular meetings of course teams discuss students' progress, retention and achievement, and the quality of teaching and learning. There is careful coordination of the GCSE course, including accurate internal moderation of assessment. All courses are reviewed annually, leading to a thorough and critical self-assessment report. Very effective action is taken to bring about improvements and build on strengths.







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