

SOUTHEND HIGH SCHOOL FOR BOYS

ACADEMY GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Prittlewell Chase, Southend-on-Sea, Essex, SS0 0RG
(01702) 606200 enquiries@shsb.org.uk www.shsb.org.uk

Headteacher: Mrs R V Worth

Change to GCSE: *A Christmas Carol* – Charles Dickens



February 2026

Dear Parents,

Please accept this letter as formal notification of the decision to change our GCSE English Literature 19th Century fiction text (English Literature Paper 1) from *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* to *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens.

All pupils currently in Year 9 will now study *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens – in brief, our rationale is as follows:

Firstly, and with reference to the analysis of structure, form, and language, we believe our more able pupils at SHSB will relish the challenge of dealing with Charles Dickens! The department is excited to introduce our pupils to one of the greats of global literature - *A Christmas Carol* holds strong academic merit for its blend of social critique, narrative innovation, and moral philosophy.

Moreover, and when considering a New Historicist approach and the role and significance of context, there are many fascinating contextual tangents for our pupils to study and enjoy: Victorian London, the origins and development of our modern-day Christmas traditions, the duality of London, the power of memory, the supernatural, industrialisation, the Poor Laws, workhouses, the protean arc trope...and so on. The list is endless!

Finally, and looking at the data over the last three years, the SHSB average for the *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* examination question (on Paper 1) is 70.4%, which equates to 21/30 (a low Grade 7). While this is perfectly in line with all other components of the two English Literature examinations (excluding unseen poetry), we believe there is room for improvement, and I am determined (in an increasingly competitive world) to explore every possible marginal gain open to our talented and hard-working pupils.

We are confident your son will enjoy reading *A Christmas Carol*. We do, of course, expect all pupils to be regular readers, and we hereby encourage all pupils (by way of preparation but more so simply to encourage reading for pleasure) to read other novels by Charles Dickens, perhaps during the upcoming Easter and / or summer holidays. *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations* are wonderful stories and should be accessible to all pupils, and there are also hundreds of television and film adaptations pupils can access to complement their enjoyment and appreciation of these texts. *Dickensian*, currently available on the BBC iPlayer, is one such excellent example.

I hope this short notification of our decision is useful to you, and that your son can plan the next two years of GCSE study with purpose and ambition.

Yours sincerely,
ACG Cass
Leader of English

