

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



7 March 2014

Mr A Crofts
Principal
The Quest Academy
Farnborough Avenue
South Croydon
CR2 8HD

Dear Mr Crofts

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 25 and 26 February 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; observation of seven lessons and three short lesson visits.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

Achievement in English is good.

- Although attainment in English Language GCSE was below average in 2013, it has risen strongly over time. Since 2011, the proportion of students making good progress has increased significantly. In 2013 the percentage making and exceeding expected levels of progress was well above average. The academy's tracking information, which includes confirmed results, demonstrates that students are currently making even better gains than last year.
- Students eligible for the pupil premium have also made better progress than students nationally. In 2013 the gap between the average points score of students eligible for the pupil premium and others was less than half than that found nationally, approximately half a grade at English GCSE.
- Most of the small number of students studying English Literature at AS level made at least expected progress in 2013. However, a few did not

achieve their targets. Those who have continued to study at A level are making better progress. Academy leaders and sixth form teachers provide effective one-to-one support and ensure that there is a close focus on the specific requirements of the examination syllabus.

- Attainment in English literature was well below the national average in 2012 and in 2013. Academy leaders have addressed this rigorously. Current tracking data, including confirmed results for around a quarter of the current student cohort, indicate that achievement is now much better than in previous years.
- Students demonstrate positive attitudes to English. They say that teachers are prepared to 'go the extra mile' to make sure that they achieve 'the best results'.

Teaching in English is good.

- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge. They plan lessons carefully and use a range of stimulating resources to engage students. In a Year 10 English lesson, students made rapid gains in their knowledge because the teacher had skilfully planned the lesson so that individual student 'experts' could lead the learning of small groups. The teacher carefully monitored the discussions which followed, asking challenging questions to stretch students and deepen their thinking. This enabled students to tackle sophisticated texts, justify their responses and use specialist terminology with confidence.
- In the most effective lessons, teachers make precise use of information about students' starting points to plan tasks which are set at the right level to help students make good progress. They carefully observe students' responses, adjusting their teaching so that misconceptions are swiftly dealt with and the more able are sufficiently challenged.
- Students know the progress they are making towards their targets. Teachers mark work regularly and provide specific advice on what to improve. However, teachers do not always check that students have acted on the advice given. As a result, a small number of students repeat mistakes or do not make such swift progress.

The curriculum in English is good.

- The curriculum provides an appropriate breadth and balance of study. Students study a wide range of texts, including poetry, drama and media texts. There are well-planned and integrated opportunities for students to develop their speaking and listening skills. Students enjoy discussion and debate and respond to teachers' high expectations of their use of standard English and ambitious word choices.
- Students, including those eligible for the pupil premium, value the extra help they receive through extra English classes and one-to-one support. Though there is a clear strategy for developing literacy skills across the curriculum, this is not fully implemented. As a result, there are occasional

inconsistencies in teachers' approaches to improving students' reading and writing skills.

- The curriculum is organised into a two-year Key Stage 3 and three-year Key Stage 4 programme of study. Academy leaders have adopted a flexible approach to setting arrangements and entry to GCSE. They increase the time spent studying English or English literature for those who need it, so that students have sufficient GCSE preparation. Those who have completed English courses before the end of Year 11 are provided with additional challenge, as they study for an AS level in Communications and Culture.
- Reading has an increasingly high profile across the academy. The reading project in Year 7 has proved effective in encouraging students to read more widely. Leaders acknowledge the need to ensure that reading strategies are equally effective across all year groups.

Leadership and management of English are good.

- The department leader has provided clear, effective leadership which has promoted rapid improvement. Students make good and in some cases exceptional progress from low starting points. Teachers work collaboratively, regularly sharing good practice and resources. The department supports new and inexperienced teachers well. As a result, teaching is good and continuing to improve.
- The Principal, Vice Principal and senior leaders have consistently high expectations and ensure that there is a relentless focus on improving the quality of teaching and on holding staff to account for students' achievement. Leaders have created a culture of high aspiration. A student in Key Stage 5, who is planning to study for a degree in English Literature, commented on the change: 'Before this, we would never even have dreamt or thought about university.'

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- further raising achievement in English Literature at GCSE, AS and A level
- ensuring that all teachers have the same high expectations of what students should do to improve their work and evaluate the impact this has on improving students' skills.

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