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Mr M Furniss
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Dear Mr Furniss

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 20 and 21 November 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 eleven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

- In August 2012, Martin High School was granted academy status. The school is currently in a period of transition to an 11-16 secondary school. The first Year 10 cohort was admitted in September 2013.

Achievement in English is good.

- In 2013, standards in English at the end of Key Stage 3 were above those found nationally, with more students reaching Level 6 than in 2012. However, the school rightly identifies that too few students reach Level 7 in English.
- Four new members of staff joined the Department in September. Students are now taught in smaller groups to provide more focused teaching across the ability range. Leaders have introduced an improved

system to help teachers to check the progress of different groups and individual students more easily and rapidly address any underachievement. It is too early to judge the impact of these changes.

- When students enter the school in Year 7, their standards in English are broadly in line with or just above those found nationally. Those with weaker reading and spelling skills are quickly identified and benefit from small-group additional support and one-to-one tuition. School records show that these students make rapid progress, particularly across Years 7 and 8.
- Accurate assessments are used to set appropriate learning targets. Students are clear about their targets and feel that they help them to keep a check on their own progress. The first set of assessments for GCSE work has been carefully moderated to ensure the assessment and tracking of individual progress in Year 10 is reliable.

Teaching in English is good.

- Teachers in the Department have a thorough knowledge of their subject. In the best lessons there are regular opportunities for students to assess their own and others' work. For example, during a Year 8 class lesson, students were debating whether a rock concert should be allowed in a local village. They assessed each other's performance, making measured judgements against a range of assessment levels. As a result, students were providing constructive feedback to each other and recognising how to improve their own work.
- The most effective teachers use questioning well to challenge more-able students. For example, in a Year 10 class, students were analysing a transcript from a popular reality television series. The teacher's questions about speech patterns and language choices led to speculation and discussion, and to further questions. This kept all students involved and stretched their thinking. In a few lessons, however, teachers accept students' answers too readily. This limits the level of challenge and progress.
- Teachers use resources very effectively to deepen students' understanding of literature and develop the quality of their responses. In one lesson, for example, students were analysing the use of music to create tension and suspense in film. They then considered how language is used to create similar effects, for example, in Henry James's work, *The Turn of the Screw*. This imaginative approach to planning and the high quality of relationships between teachers and students promote positive attitudes to learning and an enthusiasm for English.

The curriculum in English is good.

- The school's inclusive approach provides good additional support for those with weaker skills in English. A new programme was introduced in September to support students with basic skills in reading and spelling.

The school is monitoring the impact of this. Students have 'spelling banks' linked to units of work, and 'literacy mats' support students' basic literacy skills in other subjects where necessary.

- Key Stage 3 units of work are built around texts such as *The Windsinger* and *River Boy*. Teachers plan collaboratively and use imaginative and inclusive ideas to develop skills in speaking and listening, and reading and writing. Each unit is followed by a review of learning to mark students' progress and share the learning with parents and carers. Students value this review and feel proud when they see that they have moved on. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is evolving. The school has developed close links with local schools to share experiences of GCSE teaching.
- A range of enrichment opportunities enhances the English curriculum. Visits by writers, trips to Stratford and theatre visits complement students' experiences. Students talk enthusiastically about a recent visit from the author, Bali Rai: "It was so good to listen to him ... someone who is a real writer ... just saying that *anyone of us* could be an author. It was really inspirational!"
- The library plays a key role. Books and other reading materials are chosen to appeal to the interests of individual students. Students are encouraged by tutors to read and tutor group competitions promote reading for pleasure. Teachers display posters of 'what I am currently reading' on classroom doors. Students talk eagerly about this, quoting the books and the teachers' comments. This all fosters a love of reading.

Leadership and management of English are good.

- Leaders have a clear vision for an 11-16 English Department and have set clear and practical targets to ensure no loss of momentum in the transition to Key Stage 4. Year 10 students commented: "The English teachers have opened their doors to us and done everything to help us to learn and be ready for our GCSEs."

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- establishing the new system for checking the progress of different groups and individual students across both Key Stages
- monitoring and evaluating the new literacy support programme to check the impact on students' learning and on their attitudes towards reading and writing.

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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Marilyn Mottram
Her Majesty's Inspector