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Mr Chris Tooley
Acting Principal
The Netherhall School
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Dear Mr Tooley

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Netherhall School

Following my visit to your school on 1 December 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and the executive principal, the senior leader responsible for the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, the heads of English and mathematics, a member of the governing body and a group of pupils to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I reviewed information on pupils' achievement, behaviour and attendance. I scrutinised a number of pupils' books across all year groups and all subjects. Together, we visited a number of lessons to observe pupils' learning.

Context

A review of leadership responsibilities has been implemented and a similar review of support staff, which is nearing completion, is due to be implemented from January 2016. Heads of department have been replaced with heads of faculty. A new head and deputy head of science joined the school in September 2015. Twelve teachers left the school in August 2015 and seven teachers joined the school in September 2015. The school plans to become a sponsored academy in January 2016. This visit focused particularly on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils in the school.

Main findings

In 2015, the proportion of pupils achieving five or more A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics increased on the previous year and was well above the national average. Disadvantaged pupils achieved particularly well based on the same measure and attained significantly higher than similar pupils nationally. The school has also closed the gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils in the school and other pupils nationally to 7%, compared to 28% in the previous year. These gains in attainment were underpinned by pupils' progress accelerating rapidly in both English and mathematics.

My scrutiny of the school's achievement information for all year groups and all subjects, as well as my review of pupils' books, indicates that this accelerated rate of progress continues for different groups of pupils, including for disadvantaged pupils.

Sixth form learners who are in receipt of bursary funding have been well supported by the deputy director of sixth form who has secured bespoke intervention including one-to-one mentoring. Bursary learners achieved higher pass rates than non-bursary learners in 2015 in the advanced level studies.

There are several reasons why disadvantaged pupils are making better progress than previously:

- Leaders at all levels have sharpened their focus on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. Senior leaders have set very high expectations and established a 'no excuses' culture. Whole-school and subject improvement planning requires the needs of these pupils to be addressed, with clearly defined actions, challenging targets and measurable success criteria.
- Leadership responsibilities have been skilfully adapted to increase capacity and focus closely on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. A member of the senior leadership team has been appointed as strategic lead for disadvantaged pupils. All year leaders, heads of faculty, tutors and classroom teachers now have specific focus built into their job descriptions for disadvantaged pupils. Teachers must also have a performance target related to disadvantaged pupils.
- The heads of English and mathematics have worked relentlessly to devise successful strategies in order to close the gaps in attainment between

disadvantaged pupils and others in the school. They have carefully observed how teachers and pupils interact with each other and made changes to teaching groups to secure better group dynamics. They have also carried out detailed analyses of pupils' responses to examination questions, and provided extra support to ensure they rectify any errors.

- Class sizes in Key Stage 3 have been reduced following the introduction of an extra teaching group. This has enabled teachers to provide high-level support to disadvantaged pupils who make up a higher proportion of lower-ability classes. Curriculum time has also been increased for both English and mathematics to ensure pupils strengthen their literacy and numeracy skills.
- Teachers have an improved understanding of disadvantaged pupils' capabilities and have been provided with a teachers' toolkit to enable them to meet their needs better. The quality of teaching over time has improved significantly over the past year, particularly the amount of good and better teaching. Teachers consider very carefully where to seat disadvantaged pupils in the classroom and prioritise the marking of their work. Teachers also ensure that disadvantaged pupils are prioritised when arranging appointments for parent consultation evenings.
- The school's systems for tracking the progress of disadvantaged pupils are robust. Leaders and teachers can access live analyses of pupils' achievement. Leaders use this information to proactively intervene in a timely manner in order to tackle individual pupils' underachievement. Senior leaders also use this information to hold subject leaders and teachers to account for pupils' outcomes.
- Mentoring of disadvantaged pupils by members of the sixth form and teachers has impacted on pupils' progress. Indeed, sixth form learners had a greater success rate than teachers.
- Disadvantaged pupils' behaviour and attendance are analysed in detail. Assemblies have focused on the link between high attendance and achieving academic success. Leaders are aware of the need to tackle the disproportionate level of persistent absence among Year 9 disadvantaged pupils. Consequently, all staff have an appraisal target relating to improving attendance to above 95%.
- Excellent work has been carried out with the feeder primary schools to ensure that disadvantaged pupils' transition from their primary school to The Netherhall School is smooth. These pupils benefit from a well-organised summer school which enables key members of staff to establish positive relationships with pupils before they join the school in September.

Members of the governing body have a good understanding of how pupil premium funding is spent and pose an appropriate degree of challenge. One nominated governor has been linked to the senior leader who has responsibility for overseeing disadvantaged pupils' achievement. This has ensured that governors are kept up to date on how well disadvantaged pupils are progressing on a regular basis. Governors do not yet receive separate information on the achievement of pupils who are looked after by the local authority.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The school has worked in close partnership with the proposed sponsor, Bottisham Village College. Many of the successful initiatives are being currently used in Bottisham, but have been suitably adapted to meet the needs of The Netherhall School. The school has also become a member of the School Improvement Board which was set up by the Regional Schools' Commissioner. However, since this board has only recently been established, it is too early to measure any impact to date.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Daniell
Her Majesty's Inspector