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James Birkett
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Birkett

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Gamlingay Village College

Following my visit to your school on 11 January 2016, 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 section 5 inspection in November 2013.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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

- ensure that monitoring and evaluation are sharply focused on sustaining improvement in the quality of teaching, pupils' achievement, their pride in work and the impact of leadership at all levels.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the executive headteacher, three middle leaders and a group of eight pupils. I visited five lessons jointly with you and reviewed improvement plans and monitoring information. In addition, I checked safeguarding documentation, evaluated the school's self-evaluation and action plan and analysed information about pupils' progress.

Context

In September you joined Gamlingay Village College as headteacher, together with new subject leaders for English and mathematics. As part of the Stratton Education

Trust, you continue to work closely with Stratton Upper School with which you share an executive headteacher and governing body.

Main findings

Since September, you have:

- raised expectations of pupils by setting more challenging targets and by checking their progress more systematically
- introduced a 'good learning guide' for staff and pupils to ensure that teaching, learning and assessment are more consistently good or better
- increased communication with parents and carers to make clearer how they can support their child's learning
- monitored the quality of teaching throughout the school and evaluated the impact as a basis for raising expectations of pupils
- used your successful experience of school improvement to sharpen the school's focus on pupils' progression, including the next stage of their education
- managed additional funding carefully to ensure that disadvantaged pupils have an equal opportunity to participate fully and achieve well.

The higher expectations of pupils that you, your staff and the governors have shared with pupils, their parents and carers are helping to accelerate improvement. Pupils' work and their engagement in lessons shows strong determination to reach the higher targets that have been set for them. This is reflected in pupils' positive views and responses to teachers' feedback about how to improve their work. Staff recognise the importance of sustaining improvements in order to help pupils reach the standards of which they are capable. With the exception of reading, past improvements in pupils' achievement have not been consolidated enough for pupils to catch up with their peers nationally. Gaps have been even greater for disadvantaged pupils, particularly the low proportion making strong progress. However, information about pupils' achievement in the autumn term indicates better rates of progress.

Better subject leadership is helping to match higher expectations with more challenging subject matter and teaching. For example, weekly information and ideas for staff about teaching particular English and mathematics skills and knowledge are contributing to greater coherence in pupils' learning. Staff are clearer about what is expected of them and what they can teach through other subjects. This is evident in subjects such as history and art and design where pupils show that they can develop their literacy and numeracy skills further alongside other subject skills. School leaders' tracking of pupils following their transfer to Upper School shows that the skills and knowledge in different subjects with which they leave in Year 8 contributes to good achievement at GCSE. Nevertheless, non-specialist teaching in Years 5 and 6 in the past has been less successful in building a foundation for high achievement.

Increased opportunities to help disadvantaged pupils catch up are proving effective. For example, additional one-to-one tuition on Saturdays and the development of a 'support log' for disadvantaged pupils are helping to make more effective use of additional resources such as pupil premium funding. Pupils agree with school leaders and governors that support with enrichment activities such as peripatetic music teaching has a positive impact on their confidence and engagement in learning and school life. This is evident in the leadership roles and responsibilities taken by pupils from a wide range of backgrounds. They appreciate the efforts of school leaders and governors to give all pupils an equal opportunity to succeed.

Parents and carers are supportive of recent initiatives designed to accelerate improvement. Attendance at meetings for parents and carers is high. Consultation meetings include more use of pupils' work to discuss their progress and ways that parents and carers can help to reinforce good learning habits. In mathematics, homework books are proving a successful aid in following up or preparing for learning in lessons. Pupils have responded very positively to this approach, showing conscientious attitudes to learning. However, the extent to which the presentation and accuracy of pupils' work reflects pride is an area of inconsistency. Examples of high-quality work on display show what pupils are capable of.

The governing body, and in particular a 'Governor Task Group' focused on scrutinising information about pupil progress, is contributing to the challenge of raising achievement more quickly. The specialist expertise of governors is used well.

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

External support

The school benefits considerably from combining resources with the Upper School in the trust, including staffing. This has a very positive impact on some high-level teaching expertise in a small school setting. This includes the involvement of trainee teachers who gain from working across the interface of Key Stage 2 and 3. In addition, school leaders are making effective use of links with other middle schools, for example to moderate standards. The continuing contribution of school leaders to Ofsted's 'triad' initiative is helping to inform school self-evaluation and improvement through school-to-school review. Similarly, school leaders value the challenge and collaboration of others who contribute to the regional commissioner's academy improvement group. Although monitoring by the local authority draws largely on the school's self-evaluation, school leaders received helpful feedback following a learning walk and review of pupils' work conducted in the autumn term.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Department for Education, the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire and the Regional Schools Commissioner. The letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector