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Jeremy Turner
Executive Principal
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Dear Mr Turner

Short inspection of Bushey Meads School

Following my visit to the school on 29 September 2015 with Chris Moodie HMI, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in February 2012.

This school continues to be good.

You have raised expectations of staff and students since joining the school in September 2014, captured in the new school motto 'Aspire to Achieve'. Driven by your high aspirations for Bushey Meads School you planned a wide range of improvements to make sure that all students benefit from good teaching in all years and all subjects. The comments expressed by staff in response to the Ofsted questionnaire included: 'The school has gone through a huge transformation over the past year. These changes have not come about without challenges but have certainly been positive for the school and its learners.' Clearer roles for senior and middle leaders and wider responsibilities for students are helping to create a school where both students and staff really enjoy their work. This is because:

- students are punctual, polite and ready to learn
- staff know their subjects well and are keen to learn from one another
- the environment inspires students through displays of good quality work
- the new curriculum is proving interesting and relevant to students' needs
- parents are supportive of the school and their child's learning.

At the previous inspection, inspectors were positive about most teaching. However, inspectors noted that leaders did not use staff training or opportunities to manage staff performance sufficiently well to improve weaker teaching; the quality of marking was too patchy; students' work was not always well presented; and the achievement of different groups of students such as girls and boys, disadvantaged and other

students, varied between subjects. Although some variations in the quality of teaching and students' achievement still exist, the leadership team's impact is evident:

- the quality of teaching is more consistently good
- standards have risen this year in a wide range of subjects
- students are taking pride in presenting their work
- students receive better feedback and marking from their different teachers.

Improved teaching throughout the past year has helped to accelerate students' progress. For example, following improved test results for Years 10 and 12 students, predicted GCSE and A-level examinations results are higher. Similarly, more of the younger students, including those in Year 7, are making the progress expected. This includes students with disabilities and those with special educational needs. However, the extra help given to disadvantaged students through pupil premium funding (the additional funding provided for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority) is not making as much difference as it should. Although results for this group are improving and were above the national average in many subjects, in the key subject of English it was not. Improvement for this group is the top priority for senior leaders.

Increased opportunities for students to contribute to the school's improvements are adding to their strong sense of responsibility. These roles involving over 300 students, including student learning consultants, house representatives, subject leads, prefects and members of the school parliament, are reflected in students' frequent references to the school as a community.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's safeguarding policies and procedures meet requirements. Leaders and governors ensure that appropriate checks are made when staff are recruited to the school, that staff are regularly trained in child protection and that students are taught how to keep safe. Students know who to turn to should any concerns arise. Most students, parents and carers are confident that students' safety benefits from clear rules and responsibilities, good relationships and positive behaviour. However, a very small minority of parents were dissatisfied with the school's approach to tackling bullying. Inspectors investigated their concerns and found that the school's policies and procedures relating to bullying are sound but not always communicated with parents clearly.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and governors are rightly expecting more of students' achievement. Although students at Bushey Meads attain above average GCSE results, leaders and governors know that the standards reached should be higher still, given their strong performance at primary school. The school's comprehensive plans are proving a good basis for improvement. In most subjects students attained higher grades in 2015 than in the previous year.

- Effective leadership of teaching, learning and assessment is helping to raise standards. Leaders and governors have a clear picture of teachers' strengths and areas that need developing. They have made firm decisions when managing teachers' performance to make sure that students are well taught. Over 40 new staff in the last year have widened the range of teaching approaches used across the school. Their methods are shared frequently and enthusiastically. Staff are very positive about working at the school.
- Better teaching is developing because staff are benefiting from detailed feedback from senior and middle leaders. In considering the success of their lessons, staff are giving greater emphasis to the standard of work achieved by students. Teachers, including teachers new to the school, are sharing their ideas and approaches more regularly by meeting together, and through observing one another teach. This is making good lessons the norm.
- Middle leaders take responsibility for the work of staff and students in their faculty, supporting the strong strategic direction you provide. Their role in making the quality of marking and feedback more consistently good has helped to develop a system that students and their parents and carers find helpful. The way in which this whole-school priority is adapted for different year groups and subjects shows how middle leaders are keeping a watchful eye on whether marking and feedback is actually improving students' work.
- Improvements to the curriculum, including more time for English and mathematics, are helping to meet students' needs more effectively. Stronger links between subjects are developing, as shown by the emphasis given to literacy work across the curriculum, designed to help raise students' attainment in English. The sharing of teaching skills between established staff makes them well placed to embed these improvements. School leaders and governors are also taking action to address the concerns raised in Ofsted's recent report on underachievement at Key Stage 3 nationally. Work to improve curriculum links between the primary and secondary schools has already started.
- Although gaps in attainment are narrowing, leaders and governors have accurately identified the groups that are not doing well enough. For example, although much improved in 2015, disadvantaged students are still less likely to gain good GCSE grades or progress into the sixth form. Girls continue to do better than boys in 2015, in all subjects other than design and technology and history. The proportion of A*–A grades attained at GCSE and A-level should be higher. The high proportion of subjects that recently narrowed gaps between groups shows that the school has the capacity to address these issues swiftly. School leaders are giving greater attention to the training needs of support staff to increase their role and effectiveness in closing attainment gaps.
- Students, parents and carers are positive about the school's new uniform, which adds to the culture of aiming higher in all aspects of school life, including students' personal development. The weekly focus of assembly and form time, during this inspection on the theme of 'challenge', is contributing to a strong sense of purpose in lessons and other activities. For example, at lunchtime the library is busy with students reading and researching. After school, students' participation is high in a range of activities.

- The community service that all sixth formers do expands their roles beyond the school. A range of personal development themes designed to promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural maturity involve issues such as e-safety and the dangers of extremism that prepare them well for the wider world.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- disadvantaged students receive more effective support, enabling them to catch up more quickly with their peers, particularly in English
- the proportion of students attaining higher grades at GCSE and A-level increases across all subjects
- parents and carers receive clearer communication with regard to the procedures used to keep their child safe, including how the school promotes anti-bullying.

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection. Meetings were held with school leaders, members of the governing body, school staff and a representative of the local authority. Inspectors met with groups of students formally and informally and scrutinised their work. It was not possible to meet students with physical and neurological impairments who attend the specialist unit due to their involvement in a residential visit. Inspectors attended an assembly, tutor time and observed lessons across the school with leaders. Additional documentation was analysed, including reports to governors, the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, and information about students' attendance, behaviour and welfare. Inspectors discussed the school with parents and carers over the telephone and in meetings, analysed 287 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) and 62 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.