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27 September 2016

Mrs Claire Whitmore  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Whitmore

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Champion School**

Following my visit to your school on 13 September 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in February 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that the self-evaluation of its work realistically and precisely reflects the school's current position.
- sharpen improvement planning by ensuring that plans include clear, measurable steps on the school's journey to becoming a good school, so that senior leaders and governors can measure more precisely the difference the actions being taken are making.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, I met with you, other senior leaders and representatives of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. I also spoke by telephone to a representative of the local authority. I held meetings with groups of pupils and also spoke with other pupils both in and between lessons. I made brief visits to a range of lessons with you. I evaluated the school's self-evaluation document, post-Ofsted improvement plan and whole-school improvement plan, together with a range of other documents including minutes of meetings of the governing body.

## **Context**

Since the section 5 inspection, 27 teachers have left the school. Seventeen teachers joined the school this term. Of seven faculty leaders, only two were in post at the time of the section 5 inspection. A new special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), an attendance officer and a positive behaviour coordinator joined the school at the start of term.

## **Main findings**

This year's GCSE results were disappointing. Pupils' attainment was too low. Your honest and accurate review of the 2016 performance information notes that pupils did not achieve the results expected, or indeed predicted as recently as May 2016. Attainment in core and additional science was poor and well below the previous national average. Results in triple science were strong at grades A\* to C, although not enough pupils secured the highest grades. English language results also dipped, although standards in English literature were maintained. While results in mathematics were similar to last year, your own information indicates that the proportion of pupils who made the progress expected dipped. The weaknesses in some aspects of modern foreign language teaching identified at the previous inspection were confirmed by the very mixed results, which were much stronger in French than Spanish or German. Boys continued to attain less well than girls. Inaccurate and overgenerous teachers' assessment of pupils' coursework contributed to the lower than expected performance in English and science.

Some departments performed well, and attainment was high in art and design, textiles and salon services. The school's work to support disadvantaged pupils also proved to be more effective than in the past. Higher proportions of disadvantaged pupils secured a good range of qualifications than last year. These pupils made much better progress in English and mathematics than previous groups of disadvantaged pupils. It is too early to assess the progress these pupils made compared with other pupils nationally because national performance information for 2016 is not yet available.

You and your staff judge that pupils are making better progress in key stage 3 than before, although you recognise that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are still not doing well enough. The appointment of a new and experienced SENCo provides a good opportunity to revise and strengthen approaches to ensure that this group of pupils fulfil their potential.

Sixth-form results improved and higher proportions of students achieved grades A\* to B in their A-level qualifications than before. Students' attainment was higher than at any point since 2010. Your analysis indicates that this was a result of students making better progress than previous cohorts.

You have made significant changes to the curriculum, which mean that pupils are now studying subjects which match their needs, abilities and aspirations. These changes came too late for last year's Year 11 pupils but are now in place for current pupils in the school. It is too soon to see the difference this is making.

The pace of improvement has been slowed by the high turnover of staff. This has meant that many of the initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and leadership across the school, although planned, have only been implemented since the start of term. While there are some promising new appointments, for example the new SENCo and the new head of science, it is too soon for these new staff to have made the marked difference needed.

The short visits to lessons we made together confirm your view that teaching quality remains too variable. There is clearly some good teaching in the school. In the lessons we saw, the most effective learning was characterised by the teachers' effective use of information about pupils' prior attainment and any barriers to learning to inform their lesson planning. Not all teachers use this information though, or use it well enough to enable pupils to make good progress.

Much work is being done to try to improve pupils' attendance. The information presented during the inspection shows that, while the attendance of the most persistent absentees has improved, overall attendance remains below last year's national average. The school has taken a robust approach to challenging low attendance, including taking legal action, but has had less success in ensuring consistently high attendance from all groups of pupils. A new, more effective electronic system to help leaders analyse patterns in pupils' attendance, together with the appointment of an attendance officer this term, are enabling the staff responsible to monitor attendance more effectively than before. Like many of the other initiatives, however, it is too soon for these changes to have made a demonstrable difference.

The pupils I observed in lessons and around the school behaved well. Standards of uniform were very good and incidents of litter have reduced. The school environment is much improved. In discussions, however, pupils' views about standards of behaviour at the school and the consistency of teachers' management

of behaviour varied considerably. In particular, pupils who have special educational-needs and/or disabilities reported that their learning is regularly affected by low level disruption. A few pupils also complained about behaviour on their buses to and from school. While all pupils I met with said they feel safe in school, a number of pupils complained that the toilet facilities are dirty and poorly maintained. It is important that this is remedied immediately.

While senior leaders are very honest about the challenges the school faces and recognise that the results this year were not good enough, the school's self-evaluation document does not provide a realistic or precise enough view of the school's current position. In addition, the school improvement plans lack the precise interim steps needed, rooted in measurable outcomes, to enable leaders and governors to check that the actions being taken are making enough difference.

The minutes from meetings of the governing body show that governors are able to ask good questions in response to information they are given by senior leaders. Nevertheless, weaknesses in the school's self-evaluation documents and improvement plans limit governors' abilities to hold you and your colleagues to account for the quality of teaching, pupils' behaviour and attendance, and their academic progress.

### **External support**

Since the inspection, the school has continued to work with the Swan Partnership, for example, to revise its approach to assessment. The appointment of the new positive behaviour coordinator has been partly funded by the local authority. Plans to increase support from the local authority are at the early stages. This is an encouraging development.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northamptonshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Burton  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**