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Ms Evelyn Forde
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Forde

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Cophall School

Following my visit to your school on 27 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 January 2016. 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 recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- improve the quality of teaching and learning so that all pupils, including the most able, are suitably challenged
- improve the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils so that the difference between their achievements and those of others nationally is reduced.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, members of the governing body and subject leaders. I had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school's action plan was evaluated and assessment information was discussed. I met with a group of pupils and visited a number of classes with senior leaders.

Context

Since the recent inspection, there have been changes to the senior leadership of the school. You have only recently taken up the post of headteacher along with a new deputy headteacher. In addition, there is a new chair of governors.

Main findings

While there is no room for complacency, actions taken since the last inspection have shown a determination to get the school back on track. Immediately following the inspection in January 2016, the then acting headteacher recognised the need to tackle the weaknesses head-on if the school was to offer all its pupils a good education. While this presented some significant challenges, the senior leadership at the time established some important initiatives designed to address quickly the areas for improvement identified in the inspection report. These initiatives included support from an external consultant, mentoring support for the acting headteacher and work with middle leaders to establish clear expectations. An external consultant helped moderate and confirm the accuracy of leaders' judgements about teaching and learning. Training was provided for all staff on teaching and learning as well as for middle leaders on giving feedback to teachers. A review of safeguarding has resulted in tighter procedures and comprehensive training for all staff, including about child sexual exploitation, radicalisation and extremism and female genital mutilation. Pupils welcome the change in the culture of the school and understand how to keep themselves safe.

You have been in post for just four weeks and it is early days. Nevertheless, you have quickly established a strong focus on teaching, learning and improving pupils' outcomes. You and your senior leaders are taking a tough but supportive approach to securing improvement. Those pupils I spoke with strongly approve of the changes, noting that 'the school is more professional'. You have introduced a new leadership structure designed to provide greater accountability and drive improvements in teaching, assessment and learning. This has been especially so in mathematics, but subjects across the curriculum have also benefited from the tighter management arrangements. You and your senior leaders are working with the school's middle leadership to develop their expertise to monitor and evaluate the performance of their subject areas accurately. Pupils commented that the student leadership team, which mirrors your senior team, provides a helpful conduit between the school and its pupils.

Although results in mathematics dropped in 2015, the improvements made to teaching have helped to increase them slightly in 2016. You recognise, however, that further work is needed to ensure that all pupils are reaching their potential. When I next visit, I look forward to finding out how successful you have been in improving pupils' outcomes in mathematics as well as in other subjects.

An important change, which pupils of all ages and staff appreciate, is the reorganisation of the timings of the school day. This restructuring began before you became the headteacher, but you have been consolidating the changes successfully and moved them forward to eliminate the negative impact of the previous lunchtime arrangements. This has enabled a greater focus on learning and reduced the opportunity for lessons to be disrupted by pupils leaving classes at different times for break and lunch. It has also enabled you to improve supervision during these times and provide a range of clubs,

activities and opportunities for extra study that help to extend pupils' learning. Those pupils I spoke with were quick to identify these opportunities as especially helpful.

Pupils noted that the revised approach to setting targets, adopted by teachers in most departments, is proving positive. They welcome the way these targets are challenging and relevant to their learning now. Work in books shows that pupils are increasingly being given tasks that stretch their knowledge and understanding. Pupils respond well to these challenges. The books also show that pupils are provided with some helpful feedback about how to improve their work. Sometimes, pupils do not have enough time to respond to this feedback and ensure that they master those areas they are finding difficult.

The senior and middle leaders that I spoke with were clear that one of the biggest changes since the previous inspection has been the way they are now held accountable for standards in their subject or area of responsibility. They feel that this enables them to hold their teachers to account and has given them ownership of the school's performance and improvement. One of the improvements has been the redefining of senior leaders' job descriptions. These are now less about tasks and more about their responsibility to drive improvements. As a result, there is greater accountability and professionalism across the school.

Behaviour across the school is exemplary. The girls are very polite, well mannered and welcoming to visitors. Those I spoke with were articulate and spoke with conviction and understanding. They are proud of their school, friendly and respectful of others. Their excellent behaviour was shown very clearly by the way they left their lessons to assemble in their designated places following a fire alarm. They did so without fuss and behaved with a strong sense of responsibility.

Governors have acted effectively on the recommendations of the external review, identified by the recent inspection. The new chair of governors and her colleagues now have a secure grasp of the school's priorities and are becoming increasingly knowledgeable about the quality of education it provides. Governors have raised their game and are now providing challenge and support in equal measure to you and your senior leaders.

The school's plans are suitable to tackle the areas requiring improvement. They reflect clearly the school's priorities and provide realistic timescales for their completion. Some of the success criteria are not as sharp as they might be, but targets are realistic.

Senior leaders have responded effectively to the external review of the pupil premium funding. This is beginning to have an impact on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. Although there is room for further improvement, the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, including those who are most able, is rising so that it is closer to other pupils nationally.

External support

The school's leaders use external support well to sharpen their practice and support staff to improve pupils' achievements. The support from an outstanding school in

another London borough and from an external consultant has been especially influential. As a result, the capacity for further improvement, and to move the school to good, is strong. The local authority reviews have also helped the school pinpoint areas for improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Brian Oppenheim
Her Majesty's Inspector