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20 October 2016

Scott McGuinness
Headteacher
Emerson Park Academy
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Dear Mr McGuinness

Short inspection of Emerson Park Academy

Following my visit to the school on 21 September 2016 with Josephine Dibb, Ofsted Inspector, 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 December 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You, other leaders and the governors recognise that the school is on a journey and are resolute in bringing about further improvements. In the short time that you have been headteacher at Emerson Park Academy, you have established yourself firmly as the school's leader and set out a clear vision for its future. Both staff and pupils welcome your high expectations and ambitious agenda for the school and its pupils. You have very quickly identified the school's strengths and weaknesses and acted decisively to make changes that have an immediate impact. This is already having a very positive effect on the school's climate and direction.

You and your senior team have taken clear action to tackle the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. The achievement of disadvantaged pupils has recently improved so that differences between their progress and that of others nationally have diminished. While there is further work to be done to raise achievement and aspirations of disadvantaged pupils, especially those who are most able, there is a greater focus across the school on ensuring that pupils are given challenging work.

You rightly identify the need to improve achievement in mathematics and science and have taken some important steps to make this happen. Changes have been made to the amount of time given to mathematics and science, and pupils are

taught in smaller groups. In addition, you have appointed a number of new and experienced teachers to increase capacity in both subjects. This work is already paying dividends. Pupils are being given challenging work and teaching approaches are helping them to deepen their understanding.

Safeguarding is effective.

The safety and welfare of pupils take a high priority and you are currently strengthening practice further. Staff work effectively to keep pupils safe and understand the school's procedures well. Pupils understand whom to turn to if they need help or have any concerns. Leaders have established clear procedures for checking the suitability of staff, including support staff and volunteers. You and your colleagues are vigilant in ensuring that access to the building is tightly managed and that there are well-established routines when visitors arrive.

Staff have a good awareness of safeguarding protocols, including those to prevent radicalisation and extremism. This is because they are supported by clear policies and through regular training. It also means that pupils feel well supported. Those pupils spoken to agreed that they feel safe and well cared for in school.

Leaders work well with outside agencies such as the local authority's social services and child protection teams. Records are generally kept well and referrals to the local authority are followed up tenaciously by the designated safeguarding lead. As a result, pupils and families with complex needs are catered for effectively.

Inspection findings

- In a very short time, the headteacher has established a detailed understanding of the school's strengths and key priorities for improvement. This has resulted in high expectations across the school, and leaders have robust plans for further improvement. There is a strong drive to improve that pervades all aspects of the school's work.
- This drive and ambition have already had a positive impact. Staff, pupils and parents report that there is an improved atmosphere in the school and a culture that emphasises the importance of learning. Pupils say that changes have had a marked impact on their behaviour and attitudes to learning. They also note that the appointment of new staff has given the school 'a new lease of life'.
- Leaders are currently working to strengthen the way they monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Senior leaders are rightly introducing a new system that will give them a broad range of information on which to evaluate the impact of teaching on pupils' achievements. Similarly, the way assessment information is collected and presented has been strengthened. The new system is less complex and provides helpful information that enables senior leaders, including governors, to ask pertinent questions. For example, an evaluation of the impact of support staff has resulted in changes to the way they are deployed.

- Governors work closely with senior leaders and share their high expectations for the school and its pupils. They have a thoughtful understanding of the school's priorities and know what needs to be done to improve teaching and pupils' achievement. They use their knowledge of the school's performance to challenge and support the school in equal measure.
- Although GCSE results have fallen in recent years, this was stemmed in 2016 and pupils' outcomes were similar to those in 2015. Senior leaders are aware that in 2016, pupils' progress in mathematics and science was not as good as it should have been. However, they have taken decisive action to improve teaching in these subjects and while it is still early days, there are noticeable improvements in the quality of current pupils' learning. In mathematics, for example, pupils are being given challenging tasks that are helping to deepen their understanding.
- In English, pupils achieve well. Evidence from pupils' books and teachers' planning indicates that skills are being developed systematically from Year 7, ensuring that pupils make good progress from their different starting points. Work is suitably challenging for all pupils, including the most able.
- In science, achievement has improved as a result of the widely revised curriculum and better teaching. However, leaders are aware that the 2016 GCSE results in science are not as good as they should be. Pupils achieve well in physical education, sport and in the humanities subjects because teaching interests and motivates them.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils has not been good enough but is improving so that differences between their achievement and that of others nationally are diminishing. This is because the changes to both teaching and the curriculum are having a positive impact. For example, assessment information is being used increasingly well to plan work that matches pupils' abilities and starting points. This is confirmed by pupils who say that they are being pushed in lessons to do well. Leaders and governors recognise that there is still work to do to eliminate any differences, but improvement is noticeable.
- The most able pupils, including those that are disadvantaged, also make good progress. Again, this is the result of improved teaching and a better organised curriculum. For example, the extra study sessions are ensuring that the most able pupils are appropriately challenged and stretched to deepen their literacy and numeracy skills.
- The quality of teaching and learning is improving. This is because the new headteacher has recruited a number of experienced teachers, especially in mathematics and science, to build the capacity of the school. As well as helping to raise standards, this is providing the school with examples of best practice that are being used to support other teachers. While many of these initiatives are very new and have not had time to influence outcomes fully, senior leaders are clear about the need to ensure consistency across the school.
- Changes to the way the curriculum is structured have been especially significant. More time is given to the teaching of mathematics each week and classes are smaller. This is having a beneficial impact on pupils. Those that are struggling are being given specific help and the most able mathematicians are stretched and challenged to reach the highest levels.

- Activities at lunchtime and after school extend pupils' experiences effectively. There is a wide range of activities to choose from and pupils said that they enjoyed these a great deal, especially sports where they said the school pushes them to be a member of a team.
- Pupils work very well together in lessons and their good behaviour is a noticeable feature of the school. They apply themselves well to the tasks they are set and take pride in their work. Much of this is because pupils have a keen sense of what is right and know how to mix with others. They have good relationships with their peers and teachers and report that everyone gets on well. Changes to some of the school rules, such as not using mobile phones, are also making a difference. As one pupil said, this 'brings more focus to lessons'.
- Pupils have a clear understanding about what it is like to live in modern Britain and report that bullying or discrimination very rarely happens. They put this down to the effective way the school deals with incidents and the good level of care. They especially noted the house system, which they said enabled them to mix with others from different year groups.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching and learning continue to be strengthened, especially in mathematics and science, so that they become consistently strong across the school
- teachers' expectations are consistently high so that pupils' aspirations about what they can achieve continue to be raised.

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

Yours sincerely

Brian Oppenheim

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors agreed to prioritise the following areas with the school at the start of the inspection:

- the current achievement and whether the overall fall in achievement has been halted/reversed, especially in mathematics and science. What do the 2016 results show?
- the progress of disadvantaged pupils, the most and least able and the most able disadvantaged pupils
- the quality of teaching, especially the level of challenge, use of ongoing assessment and using this to reshape learning

- the impact of leadership and management; specifically, how leaders monitor and evaluate teaching quality and the impact of feedback to teachers; and the impact on behaviour and personal development including British values
- the impact of leaders and governors on implementing procedures and protocols for safeguarding.

Inspectors carried out the following activities to explore the areas during the inspection:

- They visited 12 lessons across a range of subjects jointly with school leaders. An inspector also attended an assembly.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, governors, staff and groups of pupils. They spoke to pupils in lessons about their learning and looked at books.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, and information about pupils' progress, the governing body and pupils' attendance. They also checked the school's single central record and safeguarding procedures.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's website and confirmed that it meets requirements on the publication of specified information.
- They took account of 54 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.