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Mrs Claire Whitmore
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Whitmore

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Campion School

Following my visit to your school on 23 February 2017, 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 second 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 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:

- closely monitor the impact of strategies used to reduce bullying to ensure that the actions being taken are leading to sufficiently rapid reductions in bullying
- strengthen the school's checks on teaching and behaviour in lessons that include pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, particularly in lower sets, to ensure that they are able to make at least the progress made by other pupils.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, other senior leaders and middle leaders to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. I also met with governors, including the chair of the governing body. I held a telephone conversation with a senior school improvement adviser from the local authority. I met with groups of pupils and spoke informally with pupils during lessons. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's most recent self-evaluation, its improvement plans and information regarding pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour. I also scrutinised the school's safeguarding documentation. I considered the school's evaluations of the quality of teaching and observed pupils learning in English, science and modern foreign languages.

Context

In January 2017, new heads of faculty in mathematics and modern foreign languages joined the school.

Main findings

Better leadership is beginning to bring about the improvements needed at the school. The pace of change has picked up, following the slow start reported at the last monitoring inspection, though there is still much work to do so that the school becomes good by the time of its next section 5 inspection.

You have strengthened the school's systems for checking the quality of teaching, including an analysis of the impact of teaching on pupils' attainment over time. The weekly checks that now take place ensure that you and other leaders have a more accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching than before. Faculty leaders are playing a key role in holding teachers to account for the quality of their teaching, their application of the school's assessment policy and their pupils' progress. Effective oversight of their work by the deputy headteacher is ensuring that these faculty leaders remain sharply focused on driving up the quality of teaching and, consequently, pupils' achievement. This increased rigour in the checks leaders make on teaching has highlighted the work that leaders need to do to ensure that pupils learn consistently as well as they should. Your own evaluations show that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment still requires improvement in some areas.

You have increased the rigour of the school's assessment arrangements. Drawing on external support, you are ensuring that teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment in Year 11 are more securely rooted in evidence than before. These are important developments, given the inaccurate predictions made by some staff last year.

The improved organisation of teaching, for example in mathematics and science, has ensured that pupils in Year 11 have completed more of their courses at this stage than in the past. This is helping faculty leaders to target teaching on the weaker areas in pupils' understanding, identified as they prepare for their GCSE examinations.

The current assessment information you presented shows that some of the key weaknesses in pupils' achievement last year are now being tackled effectively. For example, lower attaining boys in Year 11 are making better progress in English, and boys are making better overall progress in the subjects that contribute to the English Baccalaureate. Improved teaching, stronger leadership and a curriculum that is better matched to pupils' individual needs are bringing about improvements in pupils' achievement in science and modern foreign languages. Higher proportions of the most able scientists are on track to achieve the high GCSE grades they should. The improved curriculum in key stage 4 means that almost all pupils are now on course to complete a full suite of appropriate qualifications. This was not the case last year. Disadvantaged pupils in most year groups are making better progress than before, and in some cases, better progress than their peers make. Disadvantaged pupils in Year 11, however, are still not achieving well enough.

The school's records show that pupils' behaviour is improving. For example, the proportion of pupils temporarily excluded from school has reduced significantly, as has the number of referrals to the 'refocus room', which is used to support pupils who show particularly challenging behaviour. In the lessons I visited across a range of ability sets, the pupils behaved well. In discussions, however, the pupils I met who have special educational needs and/or disabilities said that their learning continues to be affected by low-level disruptive behaviour, especially when taught in the lower sets. School leaders do not check rigorously enough the teaching and behaviour experienced by less able pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to ensure that they learn as well as they do in other classes.

In discussions, all pupils said that they feel safe at school. They also said that they feel safer on the buses to and from school because behaviour on the buses has improved since the last monitoring visit. The number of incidents of bullying is reducing, but remains too high. You take a firm line on bullying and records show that strict sanctions are used where necessary. You also provide pupils with a range of routes through which they can report bullying.

Strategies to improve attendance are proving to be increasingly effective. Attendance is currently above the national average for last year, having previously been below average. Much tighter systems are in place to monitor attendance and to follow up poor attendance. Leaders now have a very clear picture of which groups of pupils are attending well and which are not.

You have used the findings of an external review of the school's management of pupils' attendance to refine the school's approach further. For example, an additional member of staff has recently been appointed to focus exclusively on boosting the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. This is an appropriate response because the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, though improving, still lags behind that of other pupils.

Recent improvements are underpinned by a much more accurate and realistic evaluation of the school's effectiveness than I found at the first monitoring inspection. The improved sharpness in the school's improvement plan is also enabling governors to play a more effective role in holding you and other leaders to account than before. My findings at the first monitoring visit prompted governors to ask you to produce a clear and detailed document setting out key milestones against which they could assess the school's progress. The governing body's 'milestone monitoring group' ensures that you and other staff are held to account more effectively than before. Governors know that there can be no slippage in the pace of improvement between now and the next section 5 inspection, particularly given that some of the important changes needed were only implemented in the current academic year.

External support

You have benefited from effective support from schools within the south-west Northamptonshire partnership of schools to ensure that teachers' assessments are accurate. You have also received support from schools within and beyond the partnership to help improve the quality of teaching, particularly where it is weak, and to increase the skills of senior and middle leaders. The local authority has not provided any school improvement services since the last monitoring inspection.

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