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Mr Mike Boddington
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Dear Mr Boddington

Short inspection of Esher Church of England High School

Following my visit to the school on 7 March 2017 with Krista Dawkins, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in September 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. In the last two years, pupils' overall achievement by the time they left the school had slipped. You had identified that pupils' performance was not good enough in 2015. This led to you and governors commissioning a detailed review which confirmed the accuracy of your own evaluation of the shortcomings. However, this came too late for any improvement to be evident last summer in overall GCSE examination results.

Your current evaluation of the school's strengths and the areas that need further improvement is detailed and accurate. The evaluation of current pupils' progress and attainment shows that they are improving, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, yet not robustly enough for some groups of boys. In addition, you are aware that pupils make slower progress in science than in other subjects.

You have worked hard and successfully to eradicate weaker teaching and to strengthen leadership at all levels. The actions that your leadership team have taken have been significant in the rigorous changes evident in the school. As a result, curriculum leaders are progressively more able to provide challenge and support to teachers through lesson observations and through scrutiny of pupils' work. These leaders are a growing strength in the school's drive to improve standards further.

Your use of pupil premium funding has become more effective in improving the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. You and your staff looked very carefully at the evidence of which actions were likely to have the greatest impact and you tailored support for these pupils accordingly. For example, your current information shows that

disadvantaged pupils in key stage 3 are now making much better progress in English than in previous years. This is confirmed by inspection findings.

The previous inspection highlighted the need to reduce variability in teaching so that pupils could make more rapid progress. Equally, leaders at all levels were asked to ensure that the impact of the school's actions on improving outcomes was evaluated thoroughly. Until this year, this has not been as successful as you and governors had wished. You have had to deal with significant staffing changes brought about by budget constraints. You and governors handled this challenge with rigorous clarity and care. You are very well supported by governors who know the school inside out. They are rigorous in challenging and holding school leaders to account. The school is now in a better position to drive further improvements for pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have made sure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and records are detailed and of good quality. Recruitment procedures are secure and monitored well by governors. Comprehensive training ensures that staff are aware of their duties and the signs to look out for that might indicate a pupil is at risk of harm. They know when and how to refer any concerns to the leader responsible for safeguarding.

Yours is a caring and supportive school and this helps your vulnerable pupils to feel safe. The pupils we spoke to told us that they feel safe in school and that they are taught about the things they need to know to protect themselves. There are well-organised arrangements for pupils to seek help, should they feel that they need it. Parents agree that their children are well cared for and are safe at the school.

Inspection findings

- Inspectors checked how well leaders and governors are ensuring that pupils' progress and outcomes remain good. Current information shows that GCSE results are likely to be higher than last year and that pupils' progress will be good overall. More evidently, now, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities as well as disadvantaged pupils show increased rates of progress in most year groups and subjects. While the most able boys make good progress, the performance of other groups of boys still lags behind.
- In mathematics, pupils' progress remains good, as well as across a growing range of subjects. Where progress is good and pupils learn well, teachers plan work to challenge pupils to strive for improved performance and expect pupils to do better on a regular basis. However, progress remains uneven in a small number of subjects where teachers set tasks that are not matched closely enough to pupils' needs.
- Senior leaders are thorough in their analysis of published data about pupils' outcomes and add to this with information from the school's own assessment system. In 2016, disadvantaged pupils did less well in English than other pupils in the school and nationally, reflecting the weaker performance for disadvantaged pupils in English in 2015. The school's own records show that pupils currently in Year 11 and other years are making faster progress in English. Inspectors confirm this from their observations. A

more robust system to set higher targets for pupils has been introduced. This indicates leaders' desire to continually raise expectations. More effective leadership of English is also having a positive impact on the quality of teaching.

- Senior leaders know that achievement in science needs to improve, particularly for below-average and middle-attaining boys. Science teachers are now clearer about what is expected, for example, in the use of investigative work and helping pupils to show their understanding. However, improved practice is not yet fully embedded across the department. The science area has not had settled staffing in the recent past, creating shortcomings in the quality of teaching and learning.
- The inspection team considered how well teaching enabled all pupils to make good progress. You and senior leaders accurately identified that some teaching is of high quality but it is not yet securely good in a small number of subjects. Teaching and learning are mostly strong now in subjects such as English, mathematics, modern foreign languages, art, history and physical education but not strong enough in, for example, science. Here, pupils in some classes are not clear about how well they are doing or how to improve their work. While some improvements have been made, these are not securely enough established for consistent impact to be seen.
- Inspectors considered how well the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils and in particular those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Better planned provision for pupils with weak literacy skills, through judicious use of the pupil premium in Years 7 and 8, is already having a positive effect, particularly on their writing. The support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has improved well, especially through ensuring that tasks set are more suitably matched to their needs. This is clearly evident in the small Year 7 transition group whose progress this year has been good.
- You and other leaders recognised that the curriculum for all older pupils was not meeting their needs well enough, particularly for groups of disengaged boys. Increased provision for design and technology, as well as physical education, and better vocational options have been introduced this year. It is too early to gauge a marked impact of this change, especially in improving the attendance of disadvantaged boys. Older pupils said that they are well prepared for the next stage of their education, with teachers providing detailed information and support.
- Inspectors investigated how successful the school has been in improving attendance. Overall attendance has improved and is slightly above the national average for secondary schools. Persistent absence has reduced. However, disadvantaged pupils, particularly boys, still do not attend regularly enough. Stringent measures to target persistent absentees, including home visits, are making headway with some families. However, you and other leaders know that further efforts will be needed to sustain marked improvements.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- boys who are disadvantaged make better progress in all areas of the curriculum, through ensuring that they are challenged to do their best and improve their attendance
- they improve the quality of teaching in science so that pupils make better progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Hugh Betterton
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, your senior leaders and some of your middle leaders, two governors, and groups of pupils. I also held a telephone conversation with your school improvement partner. Both inspectors talked with pupils around the school and during lessons. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 26 classes across the school with senior leaders, as well as sampling pupils' work. We scrutinised and evaluated documents including your safeguarding policies and records, attendance and behaviour logs, school self-evaluation, and the school development plan. Minutes from governors' meetings, evaluations of teaching and learning, and performance management information were also examined. Account was taken of 183 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, 180 additional written responses from parents, and 28 staff and 29 pupils' responses to their online questionnaires.