

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



30 March 2017

Mrs Stephanie Allen
Headteacher
Erith School
Avenue Road
Erith
Kent
DA8 3BN

Dear Mrs Allen

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Erith School

Following my visit to your school on 20 March 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection that took place over three days in June and September 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:

- improve further the consistency of teaching and learning by ensuring that all teachers have appropriately high expectations
- ensure that work to develop pupils' personal development continues so that attitudes to learning remain positive
- ensure that monitoring and evaluation are accurate and used systematically to continue to improve standards and teaching.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, senior leaders, pupils and students, the governing body and a representative of the local authority. Discussions focused on the actions taken by leaders since the last inspection and their impact on pupils' achievements. Meetings were also held with other staff. The school action plans were evaluated, as were a range of other documents. These included the single central record, minutes of governors' meetings and information about the monitoring of teaching and learning. Seven lessons were observed, each for a short period of time.

Context

Since the recent inspection, there have been changes to the senior leadership of the school and to the governing body. You have only recently taken up the post of headteacher, having previously been the deputy headteacher. The two vice-chairs of the governing body have recently become 'co-chairs'.

Main findings

Despite setbacks, leaders and governors are resolute in their determination to improve pupils' academic and personal outcomes. Since September 2016, you and your senior leaders have established a range of important initiatives and actions to tackle the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection. You have rightly focused on improving teaching, learning and pupils' outcomes. The thorough action plans define the objectives, timescales and success criteria for improvement effectively. The actions include well-thought-out monitoring and review procedures. As a result, the school is now well placed to evaluate its progress in meeting the action plans' objectives. For example, your very recent evaluation of the school's performance is robust and has identified clearly what is going well and areas that remain weak. This is helping to drive improvement. Nevertheless, you recognise the need to ensure that your evaluations are accurate and reliable. Consequently, with the governors, you have commissioned external consultants to moderate judgements.

Other initiatives include the restructuring of the leadership team. This is helping to ensure clear lines of accountability and well-defined responsibilities for monitoring and evaluating impact. The extended leadership team is closely involved in this work, and leaders have an increasingly accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning. Those teachers I spoke with welcomed the way the extended leadership team supports 'everyday' work. As a result, the capacity of leaders to manage change and drive improvement is secure. However, initiatives have not yet had time to have a full impact on teachers' practice, and inconsistencies remain. For example, not all teachers are setting challenging enough work for pupils, taking into account their different starting points.

You have introduced successfully a whole raft of arrangements designed to boost the standards of pupils' behaviour and enable them to gain a broader understanding of fundamental British values. Teachers' expectations of behaviour are now consistently high and, as a result, pupils conduct themselves well in lessons and around the school. Pupils are provided with a wide range of opportunities to gain an understanding of different cultures and develop respect and tolerance. For example, assemblies, 'drop-down' days and the 'uniform card' have all helped to improve behaviour and attitudes. Those pupils I spoke with talked articulately about the school's values and how these prepare them for life in modern Britain.

Pupils also confirm that the changes you and other senior leaders have brought about are paying dividends. They note that behaviour has improved and that bullying is rare. Pupils are also clear that they are given lots of information about cyber-bullying and how to stay safe online. As a result, pupils are being prepared well for life after school.

The teachers I spoke with confirmed that there have been significant improvements to pupils' attitudes and their understanding of British values. They note that pupils are now much more aware of equalities and diversity, and are increasingly knowledgeable about how democracy works. As a result, the school develops pupils' respect and tolerance of different cultural and religious backgrounds effectively.

Teachers were also clear that the work to ensure that pupils are suitably challenged is proving positive. For example, teachers note that assessment information is being used more consistently to plan learning and that teaching quality across the school has improved. They also feel that the range of monitoring activities, particularly the scrutiny of pupils' books and speaking to pupils about their work and views, is paying dividends.

The reorganisation of the governing body at the start of the school year has improved governors' effectiveness. They have a secure understanding of the school's priorities and are knowledgeable about the quality of education it provides. Governors gave strong support to senior leaders' initiative to use external consultants to moderate and validate their judgements, and provide advice about improvement. All governors are linked with subject areas, enabling them to acquire first-hand knowledge about the school's performance. They challenge and support senior leaders well and have a long-term view of the school's development.

External support

Leaders have sensibly commissioned several experienced consultants to support the school's drive for improvement. External reviews are used to validate leaders' evaluations and to identify areas for improvement. The school also works with the local authority. For example, leaders have worked with the local authority to ensure that the school's safeguarding procedures are suitably rigorous. This support has helped to raise the school's capacity for further improvement effectively.

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

Yours sincerely

Brian Oppenheim
Her Majesty's Inspector