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Mr Steve Elliott
Principal
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Dear Mr Elliott

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Wrenn School

Following my visit to your school on 9–10 May 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in October 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the principal, members of the senior leadership team and middle leaders. The inspector also met the chair of the governing body and representatives from the current sponsor. The inspector visited nine lessons, across different subjects and age groups, with senior leaders. During these visits to lessons, she looked at pupils' books and talked to pupils in order to evaluate the quality of their learning. The inspector also met formally with groups of pupils from Years 7 to 11. The inspector evaluated the impact of the school's actions since the last inspection on behaviour, attendance, pupils' outcomes, the quality of teaching and learning, the sixth form, and the effectiveness of leadership and management, in line with the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. The Education Fellowship Trust (TEFT) failed to fulfil its duty to produce a statement of action and therefore there was none for the inspector to evaluate.

Context

Since the last inspection, six teachers have left the school and three new members of staff have joined the school, including a new head of science.

In December 2016, the regional schools commissioner wrote to the members and trustees of TEFT with a termination warning notice concerning Wrenn School due to its poor performance. In March, the Department for Education agreed to a request from the trust to terminate their funding agreement for all 12 of their schools. As a result, all of them, including Wrenn, will be rebrokered by the regional schools commissioner. At the time of the monitoring visit, the new sponsor had not been confirmed and, therefore, TEFT remains in place as the sponsor until that matter is resolved.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The principal has successfully strengthened leadership capacity across the school. Senior and middle leaders now support whole-school improvement. Leaders, at all levels, have embraced the greater responsibility given to them and their role in raising standards across the school.

Staff are clear about leaders' higher expectations for all pupils and say that senior leaders support them well. Therefore, school policies are now being applied more consistently and pupils' behaviour and attainment are improving.

Following the inspection, the principal swiftly put in place an appropriate school action plan, focused on key groups. Leaders now regularly review and evaluate all their actions to ensure that they are having a positive impact on improving pupils' outcomes. Leaders make sure that any strategies that are not working are refined or stopped.

Leaders rightly prioritised improving the school's tracking system to monitor pupils' progress and behaviour, and ensured that all staff were trained to use it. All staff and pupils who spoke to the inspector said that they understand the system. As part of the process, pupils have been given more aspirational targets and staff have worked closely with other schools to check that their assessments are accurate. Leaders now have a clear picture of pupils' progress and can quickly see where patterns in behaviour and attendance have an impact on pupils' outcomes. This means that they can put in place more timely interventions to prevent pupils underachieving. Leaders have also held information evenings for parents, so that they can understand the new system and the progress their children are making.

Leaders have focused whole-school actions on the key groups identified at the last

inspection: disadvantaged pupils, the most able and boys. Leaders have provided additional training to support staff in these areas. For example, the new leader for most-able pupils has supported staff to plan appropriate challenge for the most able pupils so that they make more rapid progress. Current school information and evidence in pupils' books indicates that the most able pupils are making better progress as a result.

Leaders have promptly undertaken an external evaluation of the pupil premium funding. Subject leaders now have to submit and justify bids to ensure that the funding is being used more effectively to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. The leader for this area then evaluates actions taken against impact. Leaders have introduced an annual, external review of the pupil premium funding to ensure that it continues to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Since the last inspection, the governing body is now providing more precise support and challenge to monitor this funding.

Leaders have also evaluated how the catch-up funding, intended to help Year 7 pupils who did not achieve age-related expectations in reading or mathematics at the end of key stage 2, has been spent. This has led to improvements in the provision and therefore progress of these pupils. Leaders have ensured that information on the pupil premium and catch-up funding is now published on their website for parents.

The leader for post-16 has reviewed the sixth-form curriculum offer and introduced more vocational subjects, as well as re-evaluating current courses and options for existing students. As a result, the proportion of students who stay on for the full two years of an academic course has improved by over 20%. The revised curriculum now provides suitable pathways for students of different abilities. Leaders have provided students with a range of careers education, advice and guidance, including from previous students and external companies. Year 11 pupils, who spoke with the inspector, were unanimous in their praise of this and said that it has enabled them to make informed choices about their next steps.

Governors know the school well and have a clear understanding of the school's priorities. They are aspirational for pupils and have full confidence in the principal and senior leaders to bring about the necessary improvements.

The current school sponsor, (TEFT), appointed the principal. The trust's main approach to support and challenge is to let school improvement be driven from within the school, through the principal. In addition to this, they have provided five days of support to the school, one day on safeguarding and four days for the new English subject leader.

Following the last inspection, TEFT failed to produce a statement of action to address how it would support the areas for improvement identified at the last

inspection. Nor have representatives from the trust taken up the invitation to attend the local governing body meetings.

TEFT has failed to provide sufficient additional and effective support and challenge, over and above that provided from within the school and the appointment of the principal. The trust has not helped the school enough to make the necessary improvements to raise pupils' outcomes.

Despite this, the principal and senior leaders have taken effective action and are using the areas identified at the last inspection to raise standards across the school.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The principal has organised for staff to visit good and outstanding schools to see good practice. Staff said they have valued this and found it beneficial in helping them to improve teaching and learning in their subject areas. Middle leaders appreciate the additional time which they have been given to meet together and share good practice.

The senior leaders for teaching and learning have revised the programme of training available for staff to support whole-school priorities. They also provide additional support and training for staff who need it. Staff now follow school policies more consistently. They have a greater focus and understanding of key groups and higher expectations for all pupils. For example, all staff now use information about pupils to plan learning, including providing challenge for the most able pupils. Evidence seen on inspection and in pupils' books showed that pupils' progress, particularly in English, is improving. There was no real difference seen in the quality and quantity of work in the books of disadvantaged pupils compared with other pupils in the school. This supports the school's current performance information that the progress of disadvantaged pupils is improving. However, there is still some underachievement, particularly in Year 10. There are also still some lower expectations accepted of work, mainly of lower-ability boys. Leaders are aware of these as areas to prioritise.

Pupils who spoke with the inspector said that while homework is set by most teachers, it is not always well balanced or helpful in developing their learning. Leaders acknowledge that they need to review the school homework policy and make sure that it is used effectively to support pupils' learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders have introduced a whole-school policy to raise standards of presentation in pupils' books. Almost all books seen during the inspection were well presented and pupils were proud to show their work to the inspector.

Leaders have refined the school behaviour policy and raised expectations for

behaviour in lessons. Pupils who spoke with the inspector said that almost all teachers apply the behaviour policy consistently. They all agreed that behaviour has improved since the last inspection. This reflects school records which show that incidents of poor behaviour and exclusions have declined. Leaders regularly review pupils' behaviour patterns. They work with external agencies to provide additional support to pupils who need additional help to improve their behaviour and remove any barriers to their learning. Leaders acknowledge that there is still a small cohort of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, who need further support to ensure that their behaviour meets the school's expectations.

Over recent years, disadvantaged pupils have been absent from school more often than other pupils. Leaders now follow up pupils' absences more promptly and reward good attendance. Pupils' attendance and punctuality, including those of disadvantaged pupils, have improved as a result. All pupils who spoke with the inspector are fully aware of the importance of being in school.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The trust's statement of action is not fit for purpose.

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

Yours sincerely

Sally Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector