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27 June 2017

Mrs Mary Gould
The Matthew Arnold School
Kingston Road
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Dear Mrs Gould

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Matthew Arnold School

Following my visit to your school on 20 June 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 in March 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 recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that teaching in all subjects places an even sharper focus on accelerating the progress of disadvantaged pupils
- ensure that leaders prioritise and direct their energies towards those actions which make the most difference to pupils' outcomes.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the executive headteacher and senior and subject leaders to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the Bourne Educational Trust. I spoke to a group of pupils and reviewed a range of documents that you provided. You and I also visited a number of classrooms to see pupils at work. I reviewed safeguarding procedures by checking the single central record and child protection policy. I also spoke to the designated officer at the local authority on the telephone.

Context

Since the last inspection in March 2016, there have been a number of changes to the teaching staff and to subject leadership. You have strengthened leadership by appointing a new deputy headteacher and a new head of mathematics. In addition, you have made two internal promotions to assistant headteacher level.

Although staff turnover has reduced sharply in the last year, some classes are taught by temporary teachers due to vacancies or staff absence. However, the school is fully staffed for September 2017. Three members of staff due to start in September are newly qualified teachers who completed part of their training at the school this year.

Main findings

You and your leadership team have wasted no time in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Your strongly held belief that 'every day pupils achieve' has become a rallying cry for all staff to focus on the quality of teaching and the progress that pupils make.

Working with the executive headteacher, you took decisive action at the end of last year to address weaknesses in leadership, teaching and outcomes in mathematics. You appointed an experienced subject leader from another school in the academy trust, brought in new teachers and improved the learning environment. As a result, pupils are making faster rates of progress in mathematics than last year.

The subject leaders that I met are proud of the school and ambitious for pupils' success. They have a clear view of the priorities within their areas of responsibility and they address these priorities with determination. However, leaders' evaluations of the impact of their actions on pupils' progress sometimes lack precision. This means that they are not always able to identify which aspects of their work have had most impact.

In order to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, you have successfully raised teachers' expectations of the rates of progress that pupils can

make. You and your senior team carry out rigorous checks on the quality of teaching. You draw on the resources of the trust and the local teaching school to provide training and coaching for teachers. You also make sure that teachers' assessment of pupils' work is accurate, by arranging regular moderation sessions in school and across the trust.

Pupils in most subjects, including mathematics, are making faster progress this year as a result of the more consistent approach to planning and assessment that you have brought in. On our tour of the school, most pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, were trying their best, paying attention to their teachers and taking pride in their work. However, you recognise that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not yet consistently good because there is still some variability within and between subjects.

As recommended at the last inspection, you have paid particular attention to the progress of disadvantaged pupils. In 2016, the progress of disadvantaged pupils was similar to that of other pupils nationally in several subjects, including English, science, languages and humanities. Current assessment information suggests that disadvantaged pupils are making similar rates of progress to other pupils in the school. You have made careful use of additional funding to help raise these pupils' rates of attendance, improve their outcomes in English and mathematics and develop the role of teaching assistants. However, you recognise that rates of progress for disadvantaged pupils are not yet fast enough to enable them to reach national thresholds at key stage 4.

The strategic plan is ambitious and sets out very high expectations. While there are just four overarching goals, there are around 40 objectives, each one with associated success criteria. This has the effect of diluting rather than sharpening the focus on core priorities. Leaders should give consideration to ensuring that the plan focuses squarely on those actions that will make the most difference to pupils' outcomes.

Governors have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Recent changes in roles and the move to a committee structure have further improved the strategic oversight that governors are able to provide. The trust board and governing body are supported by an effective scheme of delegation that ensures good communication and clear separation of powers.

External support

The Bourne Educational Trust provides effective support to the school. In particular, the trust has drafted in several experienced leaders and teachers to key roles in the school. Expert teachers from other trust schools and from the local teaching school visit regularly to carry out training and development work, especially in English, mathematics and science. Leaders value this support, which they say is helping to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chief executive officer of the Bourne Educational Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Surrey. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Gary Holden

Her Majesty's Inspector