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Nigel Smith
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Dear Mr Smith

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to New River College Secondary

Following my visit to your school on 15 June 2017, with Rosemarie McCarthy, 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 September 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and members of the management committee 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:

- secure faster rates of progress by ensuring all work is challenging and by setting aspirational targets
- ensure that regular measurable progress checks are included in the school development plan based on the quality of teaching and pupils' progress
- sharpen up how progress information is evaluated, so that all leaders can assess how well all groups of pupils are performing, including the most able and the most able disadvantaged pupils.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, senior leaders from both sites and members of the management committee, including the chair to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Inspectors also met with the heads of

secondary and pupil services from the local authority. The school improvement plan was evaluated and inspectors scrutinised the external reviews of the management committee and the use of the pupil premium funding. You shared with inspectors a range of documents to show how you are monitoring improvements to pupils' progress and attainment. There were opportunities for myself and my colleague to observe the quality of teaching and learning in lessons, to look at work in books, and to meet with groups of pupils and staff across both sites.

Context

Since the last inspection you have recruited additional senior and middle leaders. A new inclusion manager and four teachers with responsibility for curriculum areas have been appointed. You are in the process of appointing a senior leader with responsibility for teaching and learning. You have also been successful in securing external support and challenge through an external school improvement adviser. There are currently two teachers on long-term sickness. The provision for pupils who have complex needs, at the Golden Lane site will be relocated to a permanent site in September 2017.

Main findings

You and other leaders, including members of the management committee, acknowledge that the previous inspection was a wake-up call, galvanising you into action to secure much-needed improvements.

You have strengthened the capacity of leaders at all levels with the new appointments. Your focus has quite rightly been to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Some of the key strategies implemented to secure this arise from the recommendations of the external reviews of the management and pupil premium funding. Initially you appointed a temporary consultant to lead on the quality of teaching and learning in the Autumn term. Since then, the inclusion leader has taken on this responsibility until you appoint someone who has a proven track record of success.

The inclusion leader has implemented an assessment system, including improved baseline assessments when pupils enter school. From this information, pupils are set targets and teachers plan work to meet different abilities. This is beginning to secure an upward trajectory for pupil performance linked to national expectations, including those pupils eligible for the pupil premium funding. Staff know where they need to get pupils to by the end of the year. Most staff share your high expectations. Pupils' progress is tracked regularly and potential underachievement is identified, with suitable interventions put in place to boost progress. However, targets are not aspirational enough to secure rapid progress.

You and other leaders have a much better understanding of the school's performance, through the regular monitoring cycle to check how well teachers are

promoting pupils' achievement. This information is used wisely to provide support and training where it is needed. There is now a more robust performance management process, which is making sure that teachers and learning assistants are held responsible for the progress that pupils make. Indeed, you have tackled underperformance robustly. You have made sure that there is greater collaborative working across the two sites. This embraces professional development opportunities, including sharing good or better teaching. The new subject leaders work closely with all staff across both sites, and use time effectively to secure accuracy of assessments. Learning assistants are deployed so that their skills are maximised to support pupils with their work. As a result, the quality of teaching is much stronger. Discussions with staff and the school's survey demonstrate high staff morale. Almost everyone is on board to move the school forward. However, inspection evidence confirms that although most pupils are set work at the right level of difficulty, there are times when pupils could achieve even more. Some activities are mundane and repetitive. They do not make pupils think hard about their learning.

The management committee have a better oversight of the school's performance, because leaders provide them with an accurate evaluation of the monitoring evidence. Nonetheless, the school development plan does not have measurable milestones and targets based on the quality of teaching and pupil progress. Furthermore, although you have a wealth of data, this is not evaluated so that leaders, including members of the management committee, are able to identify key trends in the achievement of different groups. This prevents them from getting beneath the headline news, in order to hold you and other leaders fully to account.

Inspection observations demonstrate that the majority of pupils get on with their work in lessons. Adults provide effective guidance for pupils and this has a positive impact on their progress, confidence and motivation. Pupils told inspectors that they appreciate the support they are given on a one-to-one and small-group basis. They say that most pupils adhere to the school's rules. Inspectors' observations demonstrate that staff apply the revised behaviour policy consistently. Regular meetings to identify persistent absence with follow-up calls to parents, instant rewards and attendance displays to celebrate good attendance rates are beginning to bear fruit. Your attendance data confirms a similar upward trend to that of achievement. Exclusions have decreased. However, the number of behavioural incidents has not. You have appointed a new professional to support pupils' emotional needs. It is imperative that you implement the proposed programme to track pupils' personal development swiftly in order to address more effectively pupils' emotional, social and mental health issues.

External support

The local authority officers monitor the school's work every six weeks towards the progress made to address the key recommendations outlined at the time of the last inspection. However, the lack of milestones in the school development plan means

that they are not able to assess confidently the impact of your improvement work. You have made good use of the local authority consultants and the school improvement adviser, who verify your evaluations for the quality of teaching, as well as supporting subject leaders to raise achievement for their remits.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the management committee, the director of children's services for Islington. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mary Hinds
Her Majesty's Inspector