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Mr Phil Poulton
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Poulton

Short inspection of Bensham Manor School

Following my visit to the school on 17 January 2018 with Teresa Neary, 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 the school was judged to be good in March 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your team exude high aspirations for the pupils in your care, centred on a determination that they become well-rounded young people. Through a broad and stimulating curriculum, you ensure that pupils are ready to play an active and positive role in their community and in wider society. Pupils enjoy their learning and are proud of their achievements. High-quality displays of pupils' work around the school, for example in writing, art and textiles, contribute to the culture of high aspirations. As one pupil summarised: 'At this school, we make great friends, have fun and work hard. That's why we do well.'

Relationships are warm and caring. Staff provide excellent role models in the kind and respectful manner with which they interact with pupils. Effective teaching of language and communication skills enables pupils to articulate their views and feelings appropriately, especially when they are feeling anxious. Leaders and staff respond sensitively and consistently when pupils struggle to manage their behaviour or emotions. They are skilled in catering for pupils' needs because they are well trained and knowledgeable about strategies which help pupils feel secure and learn well.

You have nurtured a committed team of senior and middle leaders who share a comprehensive view of the school's performance. Plans for improvement are credible and identify the right priorities. Teachers, including those new to the profession, feel well supported and understand the part they play in raising standards. They particularly value the helpful guidance leaders provide and how this

motivates them to strengthen their teaching skills. Governors too are ambitious for the school. They use their knowledge and experience to good effect and fully support leaders' efforts to make further improvements.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have formed productive partnerships with other schools to sharpen their understanding of the quality of education and tackle the areas that need development. For example, leaders are working closely with a group of local schools to ensure that assessments of pupils' progress are measurable and meaningful. While this is an important step in the right direction, leaders and teachers are not making the best use of assessment information to check the impact of their work. This is particularly evident in mathematics, where teaching and the curriculum do not routinely challenge pupils to excel.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school's safeguarding culture is strong. Leaders and staff leave no stone unturned in their work to promote pupils' welfare and keep them safe. You and your team are vigilant to warning signs a pupil is at risk of harm, including the dangers of female genital mutilation and child sexual exploitation. When concerns are raised, leaders waste no time in securing suitable protection and support. Families and external agencies are involved promptly to prevent situations from escalating where possible. Conscientious record-keeping and lines of communication enable leaders to follow up agreed actions rigorously. They provide constructive challenge to families and external agencies to ensure that any additional help makes a positive difference to a pupil's welfare.

Strong levels of guidance and care from staff mean pupils feel safe in school. They particularly value how the pastoral team is always on hand to talk through and resolve their worries. The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum successfully develops pupils' awareness of factors that pose a risk to their safety, including those prevalent in the local community. For example, the 'smile therapy' project supports pupils to learn how to make safe and sensible choices outside of school, such as when they go shopping on their own. Leaders continuously evaluate pupils' well-being to identify individuals or groups that may be especially vulnerable. For example, leaders are mindful that the smaller proportion of girls on roll may increase the likelihood of social isolation. In response, leaders have formed a 'girls group' so girls can talk about issues that may be pertinent to them. Parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire agree that their children are safe, happy and well cared for in school.

Inspection findings

- At the time of the previous inspection, pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning were identified as a strength of the school. For this reason, my first line of enquiry explored the impact of leaders' work to maintain these standards.
- The school is a calm and productive learning environment. Pupils are clear about the standards of behaviour that leaders and staff expect. They typically conduct

themselves sensibly and with increasing maturity, both in classrooms and around the site. During lessons, pupils settle down quickly and concentrate on the tasks teachers set. Pupils' strong work ethic contributes to the good progress they make. They are keen to do their best and respond positively to teachers' guidance in order to improve their work or correct mistakes. Responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, indicate that parents agree pupils are well behaved.

- You have developed a highly effective pastoral and therapy team who provide well-targeted support to vulnerable pupils and families to assess and overcome barriers to learning. This includes pupils who experience difficulties managing their behaviour. Advice from external agencies is used to good effect to pinpoint extra help to meet pupils' needs.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders have rightly focused on ensuring that pupils' progress is not hampered by poor attendance. Staff monitor and follow up on any absence rigorously and this reinforces leaders' high expectations. Your focus on attendance has paid off. Attendance rates have improved considerably over the last three years and are now broadly similar to other schools nationally.
- You explained that the broad and varied curriculum was a strength of the school. For this reason, my second line of enquiry considered the impact of the curriculum on pupils' outcomes, including their successful preparation for the next stage of their education, employment and training.
- Pupils benefit from flexible and highly personalised curriculum pathways that are well matched to their needs and future education or employment goals. Crucially, pupils are motivated and try hard because you secure suitable and recognised accreditation for the subjects they study. For example, key stage 4 pupils obtain level 2 and 3 qualifications in a diverse range of subjects, including GCSEs in English, art, textiles and science. Your approach to the curriculum has a clear impact on pupils' outcomes. At the end of key stage 4, all pupils move successfully to further education or training at local colleges or the school's own good sixth-form provision.
- The English curriculum reflects leaders' ambitions for pupils' achievement in language and literacy. Pupils read high-quality and demanding texts, including novels from well-known 19th-century authors and plays by Shakespeare. Teachers plan activities which challenge pupils to explore in depth the meaning of the books they read. For example, Year 7 pupils compared and contrasted how Charles Dickens portrayed the character of Scrooge at the start and end of the novel 'A Christmas Carol'. This approach enables pupils to make excellent progress in their vocabulary development and reading comprehension skills.
- In mathematics, the curriculum's strong emphasis on number and place value promotes good gains in pupils' calculation skills. Teachers are quick to pick up on any errors and address misconceptions. This means pupils' knowledge is secure before they move on to more demanding calculations. However, pupils, particularly those who are the most able, do not achieve to the best of their abilities in mathematics. This is because they have insufficient opportunities to reason mathematically or use and apply their knowledge to solve problems. You and your team are currently redeveloping the mathematics curriculum so that the level of challenge matches that found in English. Nevertheless, this work is in its

infancy and it is too soon to evaluate the impact.

- In their design of the curriculum, leaders ensure that pupils' good personal development is not overlooked. Careful consideration is given to how best to support pupils in acquiring the skills and knowledge they need to be well prepared for life beyond the school. This begins as soon as pupils join in Year 7. For example, pupils regularly prepare and cook their own lunches to promote their independent living skills. Work experience placements in retail, education and the service industries enable pupils to make well-informed decisions about their next steps. At the same time, you ensure that pupils have the skills they need to face new experiences with confidence. For example, pupils practise how to travel safely to and from work experience and future college placements.
- You and your team have introduced a new approach to checking pupils' progress in all aspects of their learning, including their personal development and communication skills. For this reason, my final line of enquiry tested out how effectively leaders and teachers make use of assessment information to secure the best possible outcomes for pupils.
- The school's new approach is proving successful because it enables teachers to measure small gains in pupils' skills and knowledge. For example, in speaking and listening, staff assess how well pupils contribute ideas to a group and adapt the language they use to reflect the formality of the situation.
- Teachers spoke positively about how they use this assessment information to plan activities that are more precisely matched to pupils' needs and abilities than was the case in the past. Nevertheless, this approach is neither embedded nor fully effective across all subjects, particularly in mathematics. Equally, further work is needed to strengthen how leaders investigate and analyse assessment information to check that the quality of teaching and the curriculum challenges pupils to achieve to the standard of which they are capable.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the mathematics curriculum successfully promotes pupils' problem-solving and reasoning skills
- recent improvements to assessment systems are embedded and leaders use assessment information rigorously to evaluate the impact of their work.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Murphy-Dutton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Together with leaders, inspectors visited classes across the school, including in the sixth form. Subjects visited included mathematics, English, art, science and computing. Inspectors reviewed pupils' work and spoke to them formally and informally about their learning and experiences at the school. Inspectors observed pupils' conduct at various points in the day including breaktimes. There were no responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for pupils. Inspectors held several meetings with leaders, including members of the governing body, to evaluate the school's performance. Documentation related to safeguarding, pupils' achievement and behaviour was also reviewed. A meeting was held with the school's improvement adviser from the local authority. Inspectors considered the 62 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and met with a group of staff. The views of parents were taken into account through the 21 responses to Parent View (Ofsted's online survey), including 14 written comments.