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Ms Caroline Braggs
Headteacher
Gumley House RC Convent School, FCJ
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Dear Ms Braggs

Short inspection of Gumley House RC Convent School, FCJ

Following my visit to the school on 16 January 2018 with Sophie Cavanagh, 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 April 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

You and your leadership team have created a calm and welcoming learning environment where pupils feel safe and secure. You seek to educate the whole person and promote the school's core values of excellence, companionship, dignity, justice, hope and gentleness effectively. Pupils commented on the 'strong relationships' that exist in the school, and the 'love that everyone has for each other'. Staff provide a wide range of additional and extra-curricular activities which enhance pupils' enjoyment of school. Pupils appreciate the opportunities they are given to share their views, and they say that teachers listen and act upon the feedback they are given.

The atmosphere in classrooms is calm and peaceful. You have created an environment that is conducive to learning. Pupils arrive to lessons ready to learn. Relationships are positive and behaviour for learning is strong. As a result, pupils are focused on their learning and very little time is lost. Bullying is extremely rare, but when relationships do break down, staff intervene appropriately and issues are dealt with swiftly.

Inspectors found that since the last inspection you have successfully implemented effective strategies to speed up the progress of lower ability pupils. As a result of actions taken, this group of pupils now make faster progress than others. You

recently moved to an extended three-year key stage 4, and introduced an initiative to increase challenge in classroom activities. Although this initiative has been embraced by staff, it is yet to have a tangible impact on pupils' outcomes. At key stage 4 and in the sixth form, rates of progress are inconsistent. Over time, subject- and pupil-group variations exist. Pupils make strong progress in some subjects, for example in GCSE English. In other subjects, including mathematics and science, progress from starting points is below average.

While the learning environment is positive, some teachers do not always make the most of the opportunities to check pupils' knowledge and understanding rigorously enough. Moreover, the level of challenge in some lessons limits pupils' opportunities to explore their learning at greater depth. Consequently, the most able pupils do not always make as much progress as their peers.

After a period of personnel change, your leadership team is now back to full capacity. You and your team have accurately identified the main development priorities for the school and are working on strategies that will increase challenge and improve pupils' progress. Strategies are in their infancy and you have identified that it will take time before the impact is realised. Leaders are supported by a group of governors who care a great deal about the school. Governors understand their responsibility to act as critical friends as well as to support leaders' efforts to secure improvements. However, governors do not always have access to the precise information on pupils' performance that they need to question leaders and hold them to account effectively.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The single central record of recruitment checks is up to date and meets requirements. Staff receive regular safeguarding updates and are well supported to ensure that pupils are helped to keep safe. As a result, pupils feel safe in school and know whom to speak to if they have a problem.

The safeguarding team is well organised and provides targeted support for all pupils through a carefully structured and comprehensive programme. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe in school, outside and online. Staff work well with agencies to support pupils and families experiencing challenges, and to tackle poor attendance. The combination of a safe learning environment and the tenacity of school staff has resulted in rates of persistent absence remaining consistently below average.

Inspection findings

- Inspectors looked at the effectiveness of strategies to improve outcomes in mathematics, particularly for most-able and middle-ability pupils. Lower attaining pupils make faster progress than their peers with similar starting points nationally, and consequently their attainment is also above that of their peers. Current data indicates that, although there is a slowly improving picture, most-able and middle-ability pupils continue to make slower progress than their peers

nationally. When we checked to see how well these groups of pupils were being challenged in their learning, we found that teachers' questioning did not always allow pupils to deepen their knowledge and understanding sufficiently. Moreover, teachers did not always take the opportunities to check pupils' understanding through their questioning, or by reviewing pupils' work. You told us that greater rigour and challenge in the classroom are key priorities for you. Although there are some early signs of improvement, you recognise that it will take time before the full impact of the strategy is realised.

- We then looked at what is being done to improve outcomes for the most able in science. Although the low-attaining and middle-ability pupils make consistently strong progress at key stage 4, the most able pupils make slower rates of progress when compared with their peers nationally.
- Assessment data is now being used more effectively to plan activities and assess performance, enabling teaching staff to prioritise interventions. Moreover, school leaders have recognised the need to increase lesson time in science and have redesigned the curriculum accordingly. Current data supports leaders' view that the strategies implemented recently are working. The most able pupils are now making faster progress than they were previously. However, outcomes at A level are less consistent. Although there is some improvement in physics and chemistry, rates of progress in biology have not increased. Some classroom activities lack challenge and rigour, and work in books and folders supports a view that pupils are not making sufficient progress over time.
- We then looked at what leaders are doing to improve outcomes in the sixth form, particularly in mathematics, science and humanities. Rates of progress in some subjects are improving, and destination data is positive. However, progress in terms of value added remains below average for a number of subjects, including English, mathematics and biology. After a period of staffing instability, the leadership of the sixth form is stable and effective. Leaders are now using data more effectively to plan lessons and track progress and there is a greater emphasis on challenge for the most able. Students now receive clear guidance when making decisions about pathways and find the curriculum extension days beneficial.
- There are signs that rates of progress are improving in some areas. However, inconsistencies remain and rates of progress in some subjects remain below average.
- Although governors are advised of the importance of tracking and monitoring progress, they are not provided with the information they need to hold leaders to account effectively.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- students in the sixth form make good or better progress across all aspects of their study programmes
- the most able make consistently strong progress in mathematics and science

- governors are provided with clear information about the progress pupils make.

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

Yours sincerely

Niall Gallagher
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, your deputy headteacher, senior and middle leaders and three governors, including the chair of the governing body. We reviewed staff and parent questionnaires. We spoke with pupils about their learning, made 13 visits to classrooms and looked at their books and folders. We met with groups of pupils from key stages 3 and 4 to talk about their views of the school. We evaluated safeguarding procedures, including policies for keeping children safe, training, safeguarding checks and record keeping.