

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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7 June 2018

Mrs Annette Cameron and Mr David Heard  
Fernhill School  
Neville Duke Road  
Farnborough  
Hants  
GU14 9BY

Dear Mrs Cameron and Mr Heard

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Fernhill School**

Following my visit to your school on 10 May 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- improve teaching across the school so that it enables pupils, particularly the disadvantaged, to make consistently good progress across a range of subjects and specifically in English
- continue to reduce the level of fixed-term exclusions so that it is in line with or below the national average.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, I held meetings with both of you and other senior leaders, governors and a representative from the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. I evaluated a range of school documents, including the school's summary of its effectiveness and its action plan. I visited lessons and considered records of checks on the quality of teaching. I scrutinised work in books across a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. I also met with

groups of pupils and middle leaders, and reviewed current pupils' progress and outcomes.

## **Context**

Since the last inspection in 2016, there have been a number of changes to the leadership of the school. The chair and vice-chair of governors are new in post and there is an interim headship arrangement of two co-headteachers. A new headteacher has been appointed to start in September 2018. There is also a new subject leader for English and a new special educational needs co-ordinator.

## **Main findings**

You and your leadership team have acted decisively and with determination to improve the school. Staff and governors share your ambition to help pupils to be well prepared for their future and ready to take up their place in the world. Your collective commitment to developing consistently effective teaching is beginning to improve progress and generate more secure attainment over time, especially at key stage 3. At the last inspection, you were asked to improve the quality of teaching in order to raise pupils' progress across all years and groups. Your improvement plans focus on actions which will make the biggest difference to pupils' outcomes. Leaders now review progress against the action plans but not often enough or against sharp enough criteria.

Staff have benefited from the training and professional development arranged since the inspection, particularly middle leaders who have been supported by local authority advisers. The leaders I met during the visit described the strategies they are using to improve the quality of teaching. These include raising expectations of what pupils can do and achieve, improving pupils' progress and intervening when there is under-achievement.

You and your team have improved the quality of teaching across the school, as reflected in your monitoring records and pupils' work in books. You have also identified a team of able teachers and they are improving the practice of other colleagues. You acknowledge that some weaknesses remain in the effectiveness of teaching and your subject leads are working hard to address these.

Your response to the previous inspection has had a positive impact on standards and progress in key stage 3, but is still to make a significant difference to key stage 4 outcomes. You acknowledge that key stage 4 pupils have a distance to travel to reach national expectations, although the gap has been closing. Nevertheless, further work is still needed to deal with under-achievement, especially in English. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 have made an encouraging start to their studies and are making good progress.

Leaders and governors have prioritised improvements to disadvantaged pupils' outcomes. You have records of interventions and other activities taking place to support these, which include extra lessons after school and focused teaching in small groups. Middle leaders told me that accelerating disadvantaged pupils' progress is a priority for their work. Year 11 pupils benefit from the extra support and have attended sessions regularly. The school's information about pupils' performance shows promising signs of improvement, particularly in Years 7 and 8. It is important that you develop a whole-school strategy to further drive disadvantaged pupils' progress up and that every member of your school community is aware of the role they need to play.

The previous inspection also identified the priority to improve pupils' behaviour by ensuring that all pupils are fully engaged in lessons and that all staff confront low-level disruption. During my visit, the atmosphere in lessons was respectful and purposeful. Pupils listened well and followed instructions carefully. They joined in discussion and were inquisitive about their learning.

Pupils find the feedback from teachers useful, especially following assessment tasks. Pupils also feel that the management of behaviour has been more consistent this year, which has helped them to make better progress. It is clear that the consistent application of the school's policy by all staff has reduced low-level disruption. However, pupils also felt that the quality of behaviour is less good in corridors and outside and this is the next priority for the school. There are still too many fixed-term exclusions resulting from disruptive behaviour by a very small number of pupils. The school is aware of this and is working hard with external agencies to address this concern.

Changes to governance took place after the previous inspection, with a new chair and vice chair of governors. The committees' effectiveness was reviewed and action taken to make their members better informed and effective. A number of governors stood down and have been replaced with new ones, who bring relevant skills and expertise. Governors are now better informed and have increased confidence to challenge school leaders more robustly. There is, however, scope to hold school leaders to account even more rigorously.

School leaders have introduced a range of steps to improve attendance. Overall, it is near to national expectations, but the attendance of disadvantaged pupils remains a cause for concern and needs to be tackled effectively.

Leaders know that while a good deal has been achieved in the past year, the school is still in the early stages of its journey to be securely good. You recognise that improvements made to the quality of teaching are not consistent across the school and have not yet had enough impact on key stage 4 outcomes. You also recognise that disadvantaged pupils do not currently make strong enough progress for them to catch up and achieve in line with other pupils nationally.

### **External support**

The school benefits from effective support and challenge from local authority experts, who visit frequently to work with leaders at all levels. Leadership capacity has also been enhanced by governors appointing a consultant headteacher to work alongside the leadership team.

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

Yours sincerely

Sir Robin Boshier

**Ofsted Inspector**