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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Keith Grainger
Principal
Garth Hill College
Bull Lane
Bracknell
Berkshire
RG42 2AD

Dear Mr Grainger

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Garth Hill College

Following my visit to your school on 4 July 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 was judged to require improvement at its previous section 5 inspection.

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:

- ensure that the extent and depth of knowledge that pupils should gain in each subject by the end of each topic is consistently clear, so that teaching is routinely sharply focused on providing suitable challenge for pupils with differing starting points.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders. I also met with members of the governing body and, separately, with two representatives from the local authority. I evaluated the school's action plan and scrutinised other

documents, including information about pupils' achievement, curriculum plans and governance. I made short visits to four lessons and scrutinised samples of pupils' work. I did this with two assistant principals, to look at the impact of leaders' work to improve teaching and behaviour. I also met with a group of pupils that I selected, to hear the pupils' views on the extent to which the school has improved.

Context

Since the last inspection, the number of vice principals has reduced from two to one. An acting assistant principal is currently covering a maternity leave, and is set to continue in the role for the next year to provide increased senior leadership capacity. The school has continued to experience quite high staff turnover. One in five of the current teaching staff are leaving this summer. You have successfully recruited new staff to almost all vacancies, ready for September.

Main findings

You and your leadership team are working unstintingly on all fronts to improve the school. You have successfully tightened leadership and management. The school's action plan is a useful tool for driving improvement. Leaders now have higher expectations placed on them to check and to be accountable for the effectiveness of their work. Leaders and governors are gaining an increasingly accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They know what is improving and which matters need further attention.

Leaders' work to improve behaviour is commendable. The new behaviour policy, introduced last September, is proving effective. Pupils are clear that behaviour has improved. Low-level disruption is much less common. Following an early spike, incidents of poor behaviour are lessening term-on-term, as pupils adjust to higher expectations. Pupils who need it are benefiting from increased support to help them behave well.

Leaders have been getting to grips with concerns about bullying and pupils' well-being. Leaders' use of regular well-being surveys helps them to check that pupils increasingly feel safe and confident to report concerns. Importantly, heads of house and form tutors are following up any concerns that pupils raise. Leaders now have a much more accurate understanding of levels of bullying in the school and are working effectively to reduce these. Pupils said they know that they can turn to staff who would do 'all they can' to support them and deal with any bullying. A few pupils reported a continued reluctance to report concerns, believing others would see them as a 'snake'. Nevertheless, the school is on the right track.

Leaders have undertaken much work to improve teaching and assessment. Teachers have received helpful training and support to develop their practice. Teaching is improving. Classrooms are now more consistently places of learning. Pupils' progress, including that of disadvantaged pupils, is improving. Nevertheless,

the extent to which teaching takes into account pupils' differing starting points remains inconsistent. As a result, pupils are not routinely learning well. Leaders have set up a suitable approach to assessing and analysing pupils' progress. As part of this work, leaders have set clearer expectations for what pupils with different starting points should achieve in each subject during key stage 3. This is a helpful step in the right direction. However, leaders have not defined the extent and depth of knowledge that pupils should gain by the end of each topic consistently clearly. Leaders are currently developing new end-of-topic assessments. You recognise that, until the depth of intended learning is clear, it will be difficult to ensure that these new assessments are entirely fit for purpose. Additionally, without this clarity, teachers are not well placed to ensure suitable stretch and challenge for pupils of differing abilities in the class.

External support

The local authority has provided considerable effective support and challenge. Regular reviews of the quality of teaching help leaders verify their own evaluations. The pupil premium review, led by the local authority, has proved useful in informing leaders' work to improve provision for disadvantaged pupils. A second pupil premium review has helpfully pinpointed what is working well and where further work is needed. Wisely, you have also made links with other schools to learn from their practice. This has proved particularly useful in the development of the school's new approach to managing behaviour, which has made such a difference to day-to-day school life.

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

Yours sincerely

Diana Choulerton

Ofsted Inspector