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Mr David Hood
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hood

Short inspection of Cressex Community School

Following my visit to the school on 8 January 2019 with Her Majesty's Inspector Shazia Akram, 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 July 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Leaders have an ambitious and aspirational vision for the school and its pupils. Their belief in the power of education to transform lives is tangible. The school motto – 'High achievement for all is our shared responsibility' – is shared by pupils, staff, governors and members of the cooperative trust.

The improvements identified in the previous inspection report have been sustained and developed further. Leaders have continued their development of teaching and learning, which remain strong overall. Leaders have visited other schools and use published research to establish clear frameworks that support staff to deliver effective lessons. Leaders provide successful support where they identify that the quality of teaching is not consistently strong.

Standards have also continued to rise since the previous inspection. Pupils' progress – as measured in the performance tables at the end of Year 11 – is impressive. Provisional GCSE examination results for 2018 indicate that pupils – including those from disadvantaged backgrounds – made much stronger progress than that found nationally. Leaders are ambitious to refine and further improve the provision for pupils and are working hard to do so. However, their plans do not clearly set out the difference that they intend their actions to achieve. This makes subsequent evaluation of the impact of their work difficult.

Pupils' behaviour continues to be a strength throughout the school. Pupils are charming, confident, respectful and welcoming. They are rightly proud of their school and their achievements. The new house system has harnessed their sense of healthy competition and has furthered their collective ambition. Pupils told inspectors that they 'love' their school because there is always an adult who will make time for them and help them with 'anything'. The school council is active and contributes well to decision-making. Pupils also appreciate the peer mentoring scheme, which is highly effective.

The small proportion of parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Written comments were full of praise for the staff, who are said to be 'ready to help anytime possible' and go 'above and beyond expectations'. A very small minority of those who responded raised a concern about bullying, but pupils told inspectors that the rare cases of such behaviour are dealt with very effectively. Inspectors saw pupils display only positive learning behaviours.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders follow guidance regarding safer recruitment and ensure that all checks are carried out and recorded appropriately. All staff receive regular training. Staff are well aware of the essential nature of this aspect of their work. They can recall their safeguarding training well and have a clear understanding of leaders' expectations of them.

Staff with specific safeguarding responsibilities are rigorous and diligent. They pursue external agencies to secure appropriate support for pupils and their families. School records show that communication is appropriate and effective. Leaders agree that it would be useful to maintain ongoing timeline overviews rather than collate these at a later date. Leaders' work to improve attendance remains effective, partly due to leaders' prompt actions and close partnerships with local primary schools.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we considered how successfully leaders have strengthened the quality of subject leadership, identified as an area for improvement at the previous inspection. We found that leaders have created a strong and effective team of subject leaders. This has been achieved through high-quality professional development, alongside ongoing coaching and mentoring in line management meetings.
- Leaders set out very clear expectations and then support these middle leaders to achieve them. The leadership development programme with an external partner has been instrumental in developing this group's leadership skills. The coaching and mentoring in school support staff to apply and refine these skills. Consequently, middle leaders have successfully developed ownership of their subject areas. They have a keen sense of purpose that is aligned with the school's purpose and improvement plan. They feel valued, and can identify the

successful contributions they make to further school improvement.

- We also explored the impact of the cooperative trust and how well trust members and governors hold leaders to account. The combination of the cooperative trust and the governing body functions to ensure that leaders are outward-looking and self-reflecting. Cooperative trust partners provide professional challenge and support for leaders. They also ensure that pupils have a very wide range of opportunities to enrich their learning and development. They have brokered high-quality professional development for staff.
- The governing body provides ongoing challenge to leaders. Governors take their responsibilities seriously. They are innovative and work hard to provide the school with the best possible resources and address budgetary pressures. They visit the school regularly and have a good understanding of how it works. They hold leaders to account through their visits, meetings and discussions, and provide suitable challenge. However, governors have not insisted on sufficiently detailed evaluations of the impact of additional funding and so do not know what difference the funding has made for pupils.
- We considered how leaders ensure that pupils have a curriculum that prepares them well for their next steps and for life in modern Britain. We found that leaders have designed a broad and balanced curriculum that promotes pupils' academic and pastoral learning well. It is exceptionally well supplemented by extra-curricular opportunities, including those for which the cooperative trust obtains external funding. Leaders are disappointed that relatively few pupils take up their exciting and well-considered range of opportunities, and are working to increase this element of engagement with pupils and their families. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain, and equalities are promoted well.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to improve teaching and learning so that all are as consistently strong as the best
- governors routinely hold leaders to account for the accurate evaluation of additional funding
- actions for improvement clearly set out the impact that leaders intend to make on pupils' achievement.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Buckinghamshire. This letter

will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lucy English
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Her Majesty's Inspectors met with you, senior leaders and a group of middle leaders. I met with five governors, including the chair of the governing body, and two members of the cooperative trust. Inspectors visited a range of classes across the school to observe pupils' learning, to speak with pupils and to look in their books. My colleague met with a group of pupils formally, and spoke with pupils informally during breaktime. We considered 36 responses to the online pupil survey and 49 responses to the online staff questionnaire. We took account of the 31 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including six written contributions by parents. We also looked at a range of documentation, including information about the work of governors, safeguarding and attendance. Additionally, we scrutinised and discussed the school's self-evaluation and development plans.