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Mr Jon Hebblethwaite
Principal
The Bushey Academy
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Dear Mr Hebblethwaite

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of The Bushey Academy

Following my visit to your school with Ofsted Inspector Carole Herman on 5–6 June 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in May 2018. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the principal and other senior leaders, middle leaders, teachers and non-teaching staff, the chief executive officer of the Meller Educational Trust (MET) and a member of the local governing body. The trust's statement of action and the school's action plan were evaluated.

Various school documents were scrutinised, including: the school's self-evaluation; minutes of meetings of the local governing body; and the school's monitoring information concerning pupils' behaviour, attendance and progress. Inspectors also examined the school's single central record.

Inspectors made short visits to a wide range of lessons. They observed behaviour and spoke with pupils during breaktime and lunchtime.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the roles and responsibilities of the senior leadership team have been restructured. An assistant principal left the school in April 2019. A colleague from within the trust is serving in an interim capacity until a new vice-principal joins the school in September 2019.

New subject leaders have been appointed in English, mathematics and the new humanities department. Although a number of staff have left the school, staff turnover has fallen considerably since the time of the previous inspection.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

School leaders, supported by the MET, are taking effective action to improve the school. However, some systems and policies are not yet fully embedded or consistently followed. Some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching remain and developments have not yet had a marked impact on outcomes across all subjects and groups of pupils. Leaders now need time to consolidate and develop their approaches further.

Senior leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and they are using this knowledge to inform and prioritise actions to raise standards. Leaders have clear priorities, which are understood well by staff. Middle leaders value their full involvement in the changes that are being made. They told inspectors that they feel listened to and appreciate that school policies are flexible enough to ensure that their application meets the needs of pupils within different subjects. When new strategies are introduced, leaders evaluate them in terms of their impact on pupils. They modify policies and procedures when necessary. For example, the systems for recording and responding to unacceptable behaviour have been simplified.

The school's improvement plan focuses sharply on the key areas that need to improve. The proposed actions are clear, relevant and specific and are set within challenging but realistic timescales. Those responsible for taking actions are identified, and appropriate monitoring and evaluation processes are included within the plan. Governors and MET trustees are carefully monitoring progress towards the plan. Changes to the composition of the local governing body, and the ways in which governors work, have strengthened their ability to hold leaders accountable.

Leaders have raised expectations around pupils' conduct. They are ensuring that teachers regularly promote the need for pupils to be 'ready, respectful and safe'. Pupils' achievements and positive behaviour are also celebrated. Heads of year work well with other leaders to analyse information about pupils' attendance, behaviour, progress and individual circumstances. They use this to plan appropriate support that is helping those who find it difficult to manage their behaviour to improve it. Most teachers apply the school's behaviour policy consistently, making their

expectations about pupils' conduct clear.

Pupils' behaviour, overall, is improving. Since the previous inspection, the incidence of serious misbehaviour has fallen sharply. This is particularly evident during social times, which are typically calm. Pupils relate well to one another, socialising companionably. They respect the school's site. There is very little litter and no graffiti evident. Behaviour within lessons is also improving. Pupils receive fewer warnings and are removed from lessons less often than at the time of the previous inspection. However, in too many lessons, a minority of pupils call out, talk over the teacher or engage in conversations that are unrelated to their work. A small number of teachers do not follow the school's behaviour policy consistently when responding to such behaviour. This limits the progress that pupils make.

Pupils' attendance is higher than at the time of the previous inspection. Leaders have introduced intensive monitoring for those who do not attend school regularly enough. Staff focus upon building relationships with parents and carers so that any underlying barriers to an individual's attending well are identified. Staff are working well to remove these barriers. Many pupils who previously had poor attendance records now attend regularly. Overall, however, attendance remains below the national average. Persistent absence for disadvantaged pupils remains too high, particularly in Year 11.

Leaders are ensuring, through regular assemblies and discussions, that pupils have a good understanding of the different types of bullying and the damage that they cause. Recently, leaders have introduced additional ways in which pupils can report bullying, including using email or by speaking with a sixth-form 'student ambassador', but pupils' use of these remains limited. Leaders investigate bullying cases carefully and check periodically to ensure that issues that are resolved remain so over time. The school's survey evidence indicates that a far higher proportion of both parents and pupils are confident that bullying is dealt with well than was the case at the time of the previous inspection. All pupils who spoke with inspectors said that they felt safe at school, and the school's arrangements for safeguarding remain secure. However, some pupils and parents told inspectors that they do not think bullying is always responded to effectively.

Leaders are encouraging pupils to raise their aspirations and broaden their horizons. The school's monitoring information indicates that pupils' average 'attitude to learning' grade has risen since the previous inspection. Pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, benefit from cultural trips and visits. Each week, all pupils are introduced to a piece of artwork during form time, which they discuss with their tutors. Reading for pleasure is being promoted well during 'drop everything and read' time. Careers advice and guidance are helping pupils to make well-considered decisions about what to study and where their studies might lead. High-profile visiting speakers help pupils to understand what work in occupations such as law, business, finance and journalism involves, and how they can pursue such opportunities. Pupils benefit from work experience during Year 10 that is relevant to

their interests and ambitions. Many pupils who might not consider higher education go on to apply, having benefited from trips to universities and the chance to speak with undergraduates.

Senior and subject leaders are monitoring the effectiveness of classroom provision very carefully through the observation of teaching and checks on the quality of pupils' work. Together with members of the MET central team, and supported by senior leaders, subject leaders are providing teachers with well-targeted and timely training and support. Inspection evidence, together with the school's monitoring information, indicates that many teachers have improved their planning, use of questioning, assessment and feedback. This is having a positive impact upon pupils' progress. Often, teachers set high standards, use assessment to plan activities that help pupils take the next steps in their learning and encourage pupils to think deeply and tackle tasks that are appropriately challenging. In some subjects, such as geography, subject leaders have made timely changes to the curriculum so that learning better promotes pupils' understanding. In many subjects, including science, teachers test pupils' knowledge regularly and make sure that gaps in their knowledge are identified and closed.

Although improving, the extent to which teaching meets the needs of all pupils is still too variable. Some subject leaders have not been in post for long enough to make the necessary changes. Some teachers do not check what pupils know and can do before setting a task or moving pupils on to the next task. As a result, those pupils complete work that is not appropriately challenging or move on with misconceptions that are neither identified nor corrected. Opportunities for debate and discussion are sometimes limited, meaning that pupils do not explore or expand their thinking as well as they might. The extent to which pupils are enabled to respond to the feedback they are given about their work, in line with the school's policy, is too variable.

In 2018, overall, pupils made too little progress and their achievement at GCSE was low, including in English, mathematics, science and the humanities. Scrutiny of pupils' work, together with the school's monitoring information, indicates that, overall, pupils are making considerably stronger progress in each of these subjects across the school. However, a significant proportion of Year 11 pupils are making much less progress than their peers because, over time, their attendance has been too low for them to benefit from improvements in the quality of teaching. Leaders are providing effective additional help for the significant proportion of Year 7 pupils who joined the school with low reading ability. Despite this, some of these pupils' progress remains below that of their peers.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Hertfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jason Howard
Her Majesty's Inspector