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Mr Nigel Sellars  
Headteacher  
Gosford Hill School  
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Dear Mr Sellars

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Gosford Hill School**

Following my visit to your school on 20 June 2019, 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 the governing body are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- increase the pace of improvement to the quality of teaching by ensuring that middle leaders have greater clarity about their accountabilities within the school improvement plan and are held to account for their delivery
- continue to improve the rates of progress made by disadvantaged pupils by ensuring that teachers meet the needs of these pupils more consistently.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, I met with you, other senior leaders and middle leaders to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I met with two governors, including the vice-chair. I spoke on the telephone with the chair of the governing body. I also spoke with the chief executive of the River Learning Trust who is supporting the school to improve. I met with a group of pupils formally, and spoke with others as I visited lessons. I carried out observations in a range of subjects and key stages and looked at pupils' work. Most of these activities were undertaken jointly with senior leaders. I took account of documents provided by senior leaders and evaluated the school improvement plan and the self-evaluation document.

## **Context**

Since the last inspection, there have been additions to, and developments within, the senior leadership team. These have had a focus upon the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. There have been some new middle leaders appointed since the last inspection. There is a range of experience among the senior leaders and a team approach is evident.

## **Main findings**

You and your senior leadership team know the school well. Your team has a clear vision of what needs to be done to improve outcomes for pupils and this is reflected well in the school self-evaluation document. You have developed an improvement plan underpinned by success criteria and timescales to review progress. You have not shied away from making difficult leadership decisions when required. For example, you have altered some roles and responsibilities within the senior leadership team. Governors are well informed and are beginning to drive improvement so that it is more rapid than was the case previously.

The previous inspection asked leaders to improve the quality of teaching and learning so that all teaching is consistently effective by raising expectations, particularly for those who are the least able pupils. You were also asked to ensure that pupils know what to do to improve their learning. You appointed a new teaching and learning leader, helping to provide impetus to this priority. You have put in place a new teaching framework and your own monitoring evidence suggests that this is resulting in greater consistency of expectations across subjects. You have introduced targeted teaching and learning briefings and planning guidance for staff. You have also introduced a common language for learning. You are successfully building a partnership with parents by running workshops for them on specific topics and revision techniques.

Middle leaders would benefit from taking more responsibility for the quality of the pupils' experience in lessons and collecting evidence about how this experience is reflected in their books and assessments. There is a lack of consistency in the way

that middle leaders use the school's teaching and learning framework to address weaknesses in the quality of teaching in their departments.

You have worked in partnership with other leaders in the River Learning Trust and carried out a recent review of teaching and learning. The review concluded that the school's framework has been welcomed by staff as it provides clarity around expectations but that there is still some way to go to ensure that it is consistently applied. The impact of this can be seen in improvements to the current rates of progress of those pupils who are the least able. When I met these pupils, they told me that they were being asked to achieve more in recent months and they cited English as a subject where expectations were higher. They also said, however, that in some subjects work is still too easy. The quality of work in pupils' books is inconsistent. Some pupils do not take enough pride in both the presentation and completion of their work. This means that they have significant gaps in their knowledge and this is reflected in their outcomes.

Visits to lessons indicated a calm, purposeful atmosphere. Relationships between pupils and teachers are positive. Teachers encourage pupils to play an active part in the lesson. Pupils were happy to share their books and to talk about what they were learning. It is clear in both lessons and pupils' books that because some teachers do not identify misconceptions and address them, too many pupils do not achieve as well as they could. Pupils told me that in some subjects feedback was too general and often about the whole class. They said that they did not always know the precise areas for their own improvement.

Disadvantaged pupils are not yet making the rates of progress of which they are capable. Current disadvantaged pupils are beginning to perform better than previously but their progress remains too slow. Visits to classrooms, scrutiny of pupils' work and discussions with leaders supported this finding. Leaders have introduced 'student-development time'. This is half an hour at the start of several days a week where pupils are introduced to the learning to learn programme and where disadvantaged pupils are given extra support in subjects in which they are falling behind. Pupils told me that this time has helped them to feel more positive and optimistic about their learning and progress. Pupils are also reading more frequently and within a more structured approach. Recent evidence shows that disadvantaged pupils in Year 7 have improved their reading ages twice as quickly as would be expected. While some improvements have been made since the last inspection, disappointing outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in 2018 have acted as a further spur to leaders.

Pupils' attendance has improved overall and particularly so for disadvantaged pupils. However, attendance rates continue to be below the national average for secondary schools. Persistent absence has improved more significantly.

More rigorous systems are now in place for monitoring exclusions. Since Easter, there has been a significant reduction in fixed-term exclusions for all pupils and

particularly for those who are disadvantaged.

### **External support**

The River Learning Trust has provided regular support and has a very good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. An external review of the work being done to support disadvantaged pupils was carried out by the same trust and the recommendations were integrated into the school improvement plan.

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

Yours sincerely

Robin Boshier  
**Ofsted Inspector**