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9 May 2014

Simon Elliot  
Headteacher  
Forest Gate Community School  
Forest Lane  
London  
E7 9BB

Dear Mr Elliot

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Forest Gate Community School**

Following my visit to your school on 8 May 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the 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 visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in December 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders. I held discussions with three governors and met with the school's local authority advisor. I evaluated the post-Ofsted action plan. You joined me on some visits to lessons to observe teaching and learning, talk to students, and scrutinise work in books. I met with five subject leaders and held a discussion with ten students from Years 7-11.

## **Context**

Since the last inspection, you have appointed a new deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher. Senior leaders' responsibilities have been reviewed and redistributed. Nine teachers are being intensively supported. Four teachers have left, including three English teachers and one geography teacher. You have appointed two temporary English teachers and used existing over-staffing to fill other positions. Two permanent English teachers have been appointed to start in September 2014.

## **Main findings**

The school's post-Ofsted action plan has a detailed focus on the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. It includes key actions which are well translated into clear success criteria. The plan makes it clear to all governors, leaders and teachers how improvements will be measured and evaluated. You agree that the plan could be strengthened by ensuring that different leaders are identified to be responsible for the implementation, measuring and evaluation of actions.

Since the inspection, all teachers have had training focussed on improving the engagement of students. We saw teaching which included activities and assessment that ensured students were engaged in learning. Students appreciate that teachers' choice of activities and resources are making learning more engaging. We also observed that, sometimes, simple good quality questioning by teachers is engaging students more. One student remarked that recent teaching is 'letting us be more inquisitive'. You know this is not entirely consistent and are eager to continue to develop the ways in which teachers ensure students are engaged well in lessons.

You have established a 'teacher support programme' which offers regular observation, mentoring and coaching to teachers. Strong practitioners are sharing their expertise effectively to improve others. Leaders are positive about the 'observation room' which makes good use of technologies to develop teachers' skills. Leaders' most recent checks on the quality of teaching inform your view that there is still some teaching that requires improvement.

You and other leaders have increased the frequency of learning walks and scrutiny of students' work. This has had immediate impact on improving the quality and consistency of teachers' marking. The introduction of 'fix-it' time for students to make improvements to their work is beginning to ensure that their learning is really benefiting from teachers' guidance. We observed that this is significantly stronger in some subjects than in others. Students' comments support this view.

The appointment of a strong subject leader in English has led to much higher expectations for the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers in the English department are now guided well about what they can do to improve the

achievement of students. This is because the subject leader is making good use of senior leaders' newly-introduced monitoring systems. Prompt action has been taken to improve teachers' assessment in English. The English department make good use of informal links with Sir John Cass Foundation School, a local school judged to be outstanding when last inspected. Consequently, more frequent departmental moderation is taking place, ensuring that students' work in all year groups is now properly standardised.

Senior leaders have ensured that subject leaders are fully involved in the increasingly frequent checks on teaching and achievement. Subject leaders have been coached to tackle 'difficult conversations' and express a much greater confidence to fulfil this part of their role. You are eager to ensure this develops so that subject leaders become the first line of defence against poor performance. You have introduced regular 'three-way conversations' between senior leaders, subject leaders and teachers. These have begun to increase the urgency with which leaders and teachers tackle concerns in student achievement and the quality of teaching.

The recent restructuring of senior leaders' responsibilities mean that governors can now challenge leaders more effectively. Minutes of governing body meetings show that this is strong. Individual governors with particular responsibilities are meeting frequently with senior leaders. Governors are using these meetings to explore what actions are being taken in response to leaders' checks on students' and teachers' performance.

A detailed external review of governance was completed in April 2014. Although this has not impeded improvement, you and the members of the governing body express disappointment in its lateness. The local authority accepts this was as a result of delays in their processes. Consequently, governors have not yet been able to discuss the review formally. However, in our discussion, they spoke positively about the recommendations. Governors are particularly keen to develop an improved common understanding with leaders, so that there is greater clarity in governors' and leaders' monitoring and evaluation roles.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The external review of governance was brokered by the local authority. The local authority advisor knows the school well and continues to provide effective support. Monthly meetings have been used to help you and other leaders review students' and teachers' progress with additional impartial challenge.

The local authority has provided a consultant to evaluate and validate leaders' assessment of teaching and learning. Consequently, senior leaders are using their

increasing confidence in their judgements to ensure teachers understand how they can further improve their teaching.

You have taken advantage of informal links with schools in the local authority to access to strong leadership practices and teacher development programmes. While teachers and leaders are positive about these links, it is too early to assess their impact.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Newham.

Yours sincerely

Michael Pennington  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**