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Ms Frances Walsh
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Walsh

Short inspection of Cox Green School

Following my visit to the school on 20 September 2018 with Ian Tustian, Ofsted Inspector, 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 April 2015.

The school continues to be good

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment in September 2017, you have developed a culture and ethos within the school that is 'Committed to Achievement'. You are ably supported by other senior leaders, some whom are recently in post. Your aspirations for pupils are high. You expect staff to match these and, typically, they do. Pupils commented that Cox Green is a friendly and harmonious school, where individuals matter and their successes are celebrated. Morale is high. The minor omissions on the school website have been swiftly corrected.

You and other leaders have developed and sustained a positive and caring community with a strong emphasis on 'pride'. Teachers and other staff say that they are proud to work at the school. Those who met with inspectors, or completed the staff survey, were very positive about the school. Clearly, from the lessons that inspectors visited, your teachers support your vision because they hold high expectation for their pupils, ensuring that they are usually challenged in their work. As a result, pupils make good progress overall.

Senior leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of the school well. You have focused on developing the overall quality of teaching and learning through intensive training, which staff report as being effective in improving their practice. While your monitoring records show that across the school, teaching is now making an increasingly positive impact on pupils' and students' learning, you know that inconsistencies remain. While leaders have also had success in reducing levels of absence overall, the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent needs to reduce

further, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.

At the last inspection, the school was asked to improve the quality of teaching so that pupils made secure progress in history and geography at key stage 4. In 2017, pupils made above average progress in those subjects, achieving well. The school had prepared pupils well for the new examination demands in these subjects by ensuring that teachers asked challenging questions, pushing pupils to think and work hard, and sharing best practice among teachers through a detailed programme of training.

You have reviewed the curriculum on offer and have made important adjustments to it. These changes seek to ensure that pupils' previous knowledge and skills are developed securely. Early signs are that this is having a positive effect. However, you recognise that a greater consistency is required to embed this fully across all subjects. The recent introduction of work to improve standards of literacy across the curriculum shows early signs of an impact on pupils' writing skills.

Pupils say they are valued and cared for well. Parents who responded to Ofsted's survey, Parent View, generally expressed positive views of the impact that you and other staff have on pupils' life in school. In the Ofsted free-text responses, one parent commented: 'The teachers are very engaging and encouraging.'

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding processes and procedures are robust. You have developed a strong safeguarding culture that permeates all areas of the school to protect all pupils. You and the governing body follow appropriate procedures when recruiting new staff that ensure their suitability to work with children. Your staff deal swiftly and effectively with incidents and concerns to make sure they do not lead to a pupil being endangered. Each year group has a 'SAFE' worker who works closely with vulnerable pupils. Adults have a strong knowledge of particular risks that pupils may face, and your leaders plan well for this in a personal development programme from Year 7 through to the sixth form. Governors check systems and approaches rigorously. Hence, 'Safeguarding is everyone's business,' as a senior leader stated.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and are confident that staff will deal effectively with any problems that they might have, especially with rare cases of bullying. Pupils say that the school makes them aware of how to keep safe against potential risks, such as drug and alcohol abuse and child sexual exploitation.

The number of fixed-term and permanent exclusions has been above national averages over the past three years. More recent actions to exclude pupils show that such decisions follow extensive interventions and appropriate support strategies to keep pupils in school, including a governors' final warning for pupils to avoid their permanent exclusion. The numbers of exclusions overall are falling, yet you recognise that more work is needed to limit these numbers further.

Inspection findings

- The first area we considered was how effectively leaders and governors are dealing with the difference in performance of disadvantaged pupils and others. In 2017, GCSE outcomes showed that progress made by disadvantaged pupils was significantly below what other pupils had achieved nationally. From unconfirmed GCSE results in 2018, this difference has barely diminished. However, during visits to classrooms and from a scrutiny of pupils' recent work, inspectors judged that disadvantaged pupils are now making similar good progress to others in many subjects. Inspectors also analysed recent school information showing that the differences between the performance of disadvantaged pupils and others in the school is diminishing at a faster rate than in the past.
- Your current self-evaluation document accurately identified that pupils eligible for the pupil premium had underachieved in the past, and that the use of the additional funding to help them catch up had not always been effective. More rigorous plans are in place now that concentrate more sharply on improving, for example, pupils' literacy levels, raising their expectations about what they can achieve through a wider range of school trips, visits to universities and working more closely with vulnerable families.
- We also considered whether English performance at GCSE had improved in 2018, especially for the most able. In 2017, these pupils made below average progress from their starting points. In 2018, performance was again weaker than expected. The subject area experienced considerable staffing difficulties, and school leaders acted to remove weaker teachers. This, alongside some ineffective teaching, contributed to the poorer results.
- Currently, the school has recruited skilled and experienced English teachers, who are already making an impact on pupils' progress by setting higher expectations on what pupils can achieve, as well as teaching a more effective English curriculum. The curriculum is now more focused on teaching the precise skills needed for pupils to be better writers. From observations, inspectors judged that pupils and sixth-form students are learning more effectively through having more challenging tasks set and tougher expectations of what they can achieve. However, some teaching is not promoting high enough standards consistently.
- The third line of enquiry concentrated on the improvements made to the sixth-form performance since the previous inspection, when it was judged to require improvement. The school responded vigorously to improve provision. In the past two years, students have performed far better than before. Results at A level applied learning and in technical subjects are now above national averages. Virtually all students make good progress. In 2017, students made well above average progress in mathematics, business studies, physics, biology, chemistry and religious studies, among other subjects. Provisional results for 2018 show that over 80% of students achieved A* to C grades at A level, with Sports Diploma students also achieving highly.
- Inspectors agree with students' views that they benefit from plentiful enrichment opportunities. Students work conscientiously because they are determined to succeed and have high aspirations for the future, which the school supports well.

Leaders set high expectations and have provided rigorous training for improving teaching. Leaders have robust systems for evaluating all aspects of the post-16 provision. They act decisively to tackle any weaknesses so that all students can thrive academically and socially. Retention rates from Year 12 into Year 13 are very high.

- Finally, we considered the actions that the school has taken to reduce the persistent absence of pupils eligible for free school meals. Procedures to deal with overall absence have been intensified to deal with the persistent absence of a small but hard core number of pupils often with significant medical and mental health needs and are showing some success.
- A well-defined system for improving attendance is now established, as is a first-day visit system to check on absence. The school has had some success with other intervention strategies, including support for families using a family liaison officer and the SAFE team. Good communication between home, transport providers and school ensures that leaders have secure and up-to-date knowledge regarding illnesses and complex medical concerns of pupils. Leaders make clear to families the important link between pupils' regular attendance and them making good progress. However more sustained work is needed to ensure that persistent absence is reduced even further, particularly for some disadvantaged pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the good teaching that exists in many areas is firmly rooted across the whole school so that pupils make sustained and substantial progress, particularly in English
- further robust action is taken to reduce the level of persistent absence among disadvantaged pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Hugh Betterton
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, both deputy heads and other senior leaders, as well as subject leaders. We visited over 20 classes, with you or with other senior leaders, where we observed teaching and learning and spoke with pupils about their

work. We talked with pupils at breaktime and lunchtime, meeting small groups more formally from across all year groups. I met with three governors, including the chair and vice-chair. We scrutinised a wide range of documents, including your self-evaluation, safeguarding information and your school development plan. We considered 131 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, as well as 131 free-text responses. We analysed 65 responses from staff and 319 responses from pupils to their respective online inspection questionnaires.