

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Jane Hadlow
Conisborough College
Conisborough Crescent
Catford
London
SE6 2SE

Dear Mrs Hadlow

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Conisborough College

Following my visit to your school on 9 May 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 governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that the quality of teaching is routinely good across all subjects
- continue to improve behaviour
- develop pupils' literacy skills through opportunities for extended writing
- ensure that all policies and procedures are regularly and robustly reviewed to ensure that they have the intended impact.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the chair, the vice-chair and three other members of the governing body, the interim director of Lewisham Learning, the school improvement partner, the police officer attached to the

school, the police sergeant responsible for school policing in Lewisham and other senior and middle leaders. These meetings were to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I spoke informally with pupils during lessons and social time. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's most recent self-evaluation, improvement plans and external reviews. I considered information regarding pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour, and the single central record of staff checks. I observed pupils' arrival at the beginning of the school day, attended an assembly and made seven short visits to lessons, accompanied by you or another member of the school leadership team.

Context

Since the previous inspection in May 2018, you were appointed as interim headteacher from September 2018. This was made permanent in November 2018. You have restructured the senior leadership team and created new areas of responsibility. You have increased senior leadership capacity by appointing an experienced deputy headteacher in an interim position. He has been in post since December 2018. Additionally, you have appointed an assistant headteacher responsible for inclusion, who has been in post since April 2019. An interim special educational needs coordinator has been appointed from April 2019 and a new leader in mathematics has been appointed from January 2019. Recruitment of staff is difficult, and the school takes every opportunity to work with teacher training providers. Since your appointment, you and the governing body have been mindful of challenging events in school and the local area, and the impact these have had on the well-being of the school community.

Main findings

Since your appointment, you have developed a culture of high aspiration. Leaders have wasted no time in addressing the key issues for improvement at the school. These include those identified at the last inspection. Your determination and energy, supported by thorough self-evaluation and focused improvement planning, are making a positive difference to pupils and staff. Through clear policies and procedures, you are bringing cohesion and consistency to the school.

You are acutely aware that the GCSE results in 2018 were too low. You have taken swift action to support current pupils. As a result, from September, the number of option subjects for Year 10 and Year 11 pupils has been reduced. This was to increase teaching time to support their studies. Interventions have been put in place to support Year 11 pupils. These include three residential weekends with a focus on English, mathematics and science. The structure of the school day has been changed to create double lessons where appropriate. This has resulted in less movement around school and more learning time.

From September 2019, the school will move to a three-year key stage 3. This is to strengthen the curriculum and embed knowledge and skills required for successful key stage 4 study. An improved personal, social, health and economic education provision has been implemented. Pupils now receive impartial careers advice. School data shows some improvements in pupils' outcomes. Nonetheless, there is a long way to go to ensure that all groups of pupils, across every subject, achieve the outcomes of which they are capable.

Leaders are taking effective action to ensure that teaching is routinely good. You have introduced the 'Conisborough Charter', which outlines leaders' minimum expectations with regard to teaching and learning. Opportunities have been created for staff to engage in professional development. This is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' learning.

You identified that assessment data was not accurate. Subsequently, you have introduced a new school data system. Leaders check the validity of pupils' assessment information with external agencies and use unseen mock examination papers to test pupils' knowledge. Teachers have sharpened their understanding of GCSE grades through better use of the material provided by the examination boards. All this enables more accurate assessment of pupils' progress. Leaders are in a stronger position to check the progress pupils make against their targets. Consequently, they provide planned interventions for pupils who are falling behind.

In lessons visited, some teachers demonstrated strong subject knowledge and planned activities to meet their pupils' learning needs. Their effective use of questioning deepened pupils' knowledge and understanding. Pupils were focused and participated readily. Where feedback to pupils is in line with school policy, pupils have regular opportunities to improve their work. However, when the feedback is not regular or not specific enough, pupils do not make as strong progress.

You have strengthened checks on the quality of teaching and learning. Leaders are working to ensure that monitoring is not just focused on whether teachers comply with school initiatives but that it reflects the effectiveness of teaching. Documentation shows that teaching and learning are improving but there are still inconsistencies across and within subjects.

A new literacy policy is beginning to develop a reading culture across the school. In lessons, pupils are encouraged to develop a wider vocabulary. Opportunities for pupils to develop their skills through extended writing are increasing but are still limited.

Middle leaders feel supported and empowered to take responsibility for their areas and are accountable for their teams. They spoke positively about the impact of working with leaders in school and external consultants. They know

they are given responsibility to make changes when required. They value the personal training opportunities they have to develop their skills. For example, they attend relevant courses and share good practice among themselves.

Governors are clear about their statutory safeguarding responsibilities. They are committed to improving outcomes for young people and have a useful range of skills. Documents show that governors provide challenge and support to leaders, and that the level of challenge is becoming more robust. Governors are reflective and wish to improve their effectiveness. As such, they are considering some input from a national leader of governance or an external review of governance.

Approaches to improve behaviour are effective. A new behaviour management system is in place. Staff, pupils, parents and carers are clear about the required conduct of pupils. A reward and recognition culture is being successfully established and is valued by pupils. The introduction of the 'line-up' for morning and afternoon sessions has led to a more calm and orderly start. This means that the majority of pupils arrive to lessons more focused on their learning. The school uses internal isolation effectively to withdraw pupils who disrupt lessons. The school works well with external agencies to support vulnerable pupils. The 'hub' is a new provision, which supports pupils who are at risk of permanent exclusion. A 'hands-off' policy is helping to reduce incidents of anti-social behaviour in school.

Staff and pupils said that behaviour is improving. The school's data supports this. However, some pupils said that there is still inconsistency in how effectively behaviour and bullying are dealt with by staff. Attendance is just below the national average but is improving.

External support

Support has been given through Lewisham Learning and Secondary Challenge. Last academic year, the English, mathematics and science departments received specialist advisory support for one day a week. The local authority recognises the need to provide the school with high-quality support to accelerate the progress required for the school to be good. This year, the local authority has provided consultants in English, mathematics, science, geography and foreign languages.

The interim director has successfully applied for funding from the Department for Education to support schools that are operating below the government's current floor standards. In addition, a national leader of education has been appointed to work with the school. A school improvement partner has been working with the school since January 2019. School leaders are positive about the support they receive and the capacity it adds to leadership. It is important that this external support continues.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Parker
Her Majesty's Inspector