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29 September 2016

Mr Patrick Cummings  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Cummings

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Eckington School**

Following my visit to your school on 16 September 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that 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 March 2016. 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 in order to become a good school.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and the deputy headteacher, and with a senior leader with responsibility for the curriculum. I met with a representative of the local authority. I visited lessons, looked at the pupils' work, held discussions with pupils during my tour and at a separate meeting. I looked at safeguarding records and evaluated the school's post-inspection action plan and the governors' action plan, drawn up in response to the external review of governance.

### **Main findings**

You and the senior leaders have responded earnestly and with conviction to the recommendations from the recent inspection. All aspects of the recommendations

have been included in your post-inspection action plan. You are now getting on with the job of putting that plan into action, making the necessary improvements in a coherent and coordinated way. You and the other senior leaders convey convincingly that you have your 'fingers on the pulse' of what is happening in terms of the improvement at the school.

You have provided leaders with responsibilities for learning within the different subject departments with suitable training, so that they are now able to contribute to evaluating the work of their subjects in a consistent way. The early signs show improvement 'across the board' in pupils' achievement, helped by the changes to which leaders' work has led.

I saw various examples in classrooms of practical responses by teachers to the areas for improvement. The pupils with whom I spoke described various ways in which the teachers are now providing them with work at an appropriate level for each of them. They knew also about the opportunities they get to move on to more difficult tasks.

The teachers used a range of approaches to questioning pupils. More often than not, the teachers probed the pupils' answers with further questions, which made the pupils think more deeply about the subject than they had when first answering. The pupils explained to me that the teachers often question them productively. Nevertheless, I saw examples also of questioning that was not as penetrating as it could have been, which meant that, on those occasions, the pupils' understanding was restricted.

You have ensured that more attention is paid now than at the time of the inspection to correcting pupils' spelling, grammar and punctuation. You have introduced more opportunities for the pupils to produce extended pieces of writing in a range of subjects. I did not, however, see evidence during this visit of a more wide-ranging approach to developing pupils' literacy skills.

You told me that you have given extra emphasis since the inspection to the standards of presentation by the pupils of their work. I saw a lot of evidence in lessons of well-presented pupils' work. Indeed, this was, for the pupils with whom I spoke, the most striking change in what the teachers have been doing.

You have already put in place the changes in the curriculum called for by the inspectors. From the beginning of this academic year, the pupils in years 9 and 10 are able to take triple science. For year 11, you have adapted the curriculum so that there is at least the opportunity for them to study science subjects for as much time each week as the pupils in years 9 and 10.

At the same time, you have doubled the number of courses available in the sixth form for students to study applied or work-related subjects, or at levels more suitable to the next stage of their education or employment, than were available at the time of the inspection. In addition, you have re-invigorated and extended the

sixth-form programme of personal and social education, work experience and enrichment activities. These improvements got under way this term.

The external review of governance was carried out promptly. Following quickly on from that, the governing body developed an action plan to carry out the recommendations from the review. At the time of my visit, the governing body had had no opportunity to begin that work. Accordingly, I shall propose to Ofsted that I revisit the school at some point to look at the effectiveness of the proposed improvements.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. I have recommended to Ofsted that I stay in contact with the school and I am likely to visit again to check that the very recent improvements have been sustained and built on.

### **External support**

The local authority has been instrumental in getting the external review of governance carried out promptly and in the initial work to implement the recommendations. It has, in addition, brokered a suitable package of support that is assisting the school in providing effective professional development for leaders and managers, and with relevant aspects of teaching and learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Clive Moss  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**