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Mrs K Macleod
Headteacher
New Directions
The Storey Centre
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Dear Mrs Macleod

Short inspection of New Directions

Following my visit to the school on 4 October 2017 with Charlotte Millward, 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 September 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You are ambitious for all pupils and have raised everyone's expectations. As a consequence, pupils are now making better progress. There is a clear determination to ensure that pupils turn their lives around to become responsible individuals. The newly formed senior leadership team and staff are fully behind you. As a result, the school is on a clear upward trend of rapid improvement.

You have rightly identified that since the previous inspection there has been a drop in standards. Weaknesses in teaching exacerbated by instability in staffing and limited capacity in leadership all contributed to this decline. You are very well supported by the management committee, deputy headteacher and other senior leaders. You are outward-looking and have begun to secure effective partnerships with the other pupil referral units and schools. Nonetheless, the lack of information from mainstream schools hinders your ability to build up a fully comprehensive picture for each pupil.

You have successfully restored high staff morale and good-quality teaching, learning and assessment, because you have made strong appointments to the staffing team. You play to leaders' strengths, thereby maximising the impact of everyone's work. Most of the recommendations relating to the quality of teaching have been

addressed. Nonetheless, despite a steady staff, there remain inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. Rates of attendance are improving but continue to be below average.

Safeguarding is effective.

Senior leaders and members of the management committee have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Staff have had up-to-date training, and are pivotal in spotting any potential signs of danger for pupils. In fact, the designated safeguarding lead explained that safeguarding is central to everyone's work and is 'a constant aspect in all our conversations'.

Urgent action is taken to alert the relevant authorities to protect pupils and minimise risks as a result of regular safeguarding meetings. Safeguarding staff work with key agencies to identify and help to keep safe the most vulnerable pupils from risks including gang affiliation, child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation, radicalisation and children missing education.

Indeed, you go the extra mile, because of the challenging context of the provision. You and other leaders have made sure that those pupils who do not regularly attend the unit access their education outside the local authority. This is an attempt to help these pupils dissociate from gang culture, to raise their self-esteem and help them begin to achieve academically.

Likewise, potential danger and areas of concern form a significant part of the personal, social, health and economics (PSHE) education programmes, including 'character education'. Pupils are better able to assess risks and to make the right choices about their behaviour and ultimately their life chances. They also achieve an accredited qualification.

Pupils' views are taken seriously, including those highlighted in the pupil working group. School leaders and key professionals, including the police, the youth offending team and social services, have frank discussions to help pupils understand the consequences of their often damaging choices.

Leaders make sure that all the relevant checks on members of staff, governors and other adults in the school are completed. The single central record is kept up to date and regularly checked by the safeguarding committee member.

Inspection findings

- This inspection looked at the impact of the new senior leadership team on the school's performance. The management committee has strengthened the quality of leadership and management with your appointment as headteacher.
- You wisely restructured senior leaders' roles and responsibilities, which has boosted capacity still further. The joint leadership model across the pupil referral

units has secured greater collaboration, where good practice is shared at both leadership and teaching levels.

- You have made sure that the profile of teaching has improved significantly, tackling underperformance head on. New teaching appointments, a clear programme of professional development, coaching and a rigorous performance management cycle have boosted the profile of teaching significantly.
- The deputy headteacher has implemented a new assessment system to check more accurately on the progress pupils make. This information, together with a clear cycle of monitoring, informs self-evaluation and improvement planning well.
- Checks on pupils' skills when they enter the unit are comprehensive, and as well as English and mathematics include an assessment by the speech and language therapist and a mental health assessment. This secures rapid intervention work to be implemented in order to fill significant gaps in pupils' learning, boosting progress and pupils' sense of well-being.
- However, you and the deputy headteacher explained that mainstream schools do not always provide you with a comprehensive profile of a pupils' previous achievement. This can hinder your ability to set the most aspirational end of Year 11 targets for pupils.
- Plans for improvement lack measurable targets and there is no comparison to national progression rates. This makes it difficult for you and other leaders, including members of the management committee, to assess the impact of improvement work.
- The second focus of this inspection was the breadth and balance of the curriculum. It is evident that you have begun to broaden the curriculum offer for pupils. Increasingly, curriculum pathways are better tailored to pupils' needs, abilities and interests.
- There is a distinct move away from the narrow curriculum offer. Almost all pupils last year gained college places, apprenticeships or employment. Pupils are now able to study for GCSE qualifications in English and mathematics, including at the higher levels. You maximise some resources across the pupil referral units, for example in music. You and other leaders are exploring different avenues for pupils to study a science subject, as well as land-based studies.
- This is because baseline assessments give you a much clearer profile of pupils' strengths and weaknesses. It also reflects higher expectations for pupils when they attend this school and post-16.
- There is a good range of vocational and functional courses, including work-based studies and accreditation, within school and externally.
- The third line of enquiry focused on the progress pupils are currently making. From our joint observations, we agreed that the new assessment checklist is being used well by most teachers, and particularly so in writing. As a result, teachers and pupils have a good picture of pupils' achievements and next steps in learning.
- However, work in pupils' mathematics books demonstrates that assessments are not always used well enough to secure faster progress. This is particularly so for

those pupils who find learning easy.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and they are keen to share their enthusiasm so that pupils enjoy their learning. There are good opportunities for pupils to practise and apply their literacy and numeracy skills. A new phonics scheme is to be implemented, to boost pupils' achievement further.
- The appointment of a new English teacher has galvanised pupils' progress in this subject, especially in writing. Pupils have good support in lessons with key vocabulary to support them in their reading and writing.
- Some work has begun to boost pupils' progress and confidence in reading. Older pupils read to younger pupils, and there are regular opportunities for pupils to read in class.
- Pupils who read to inspectors did so with fluency, expression and good comprehension. However, a check on pupils' progress in reading confirms that pupils do not always make good progress. They are not always encouraged to develop a love of reading. This inhibits pupils' motivation to want to read, including at home, impeding their progress.
- Relationships are strong in lessons and pupils are keen to do their best and contribute to their learning. There is a focus on developing pupils' resilience and leadership skills in most lessons.
- However, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to work on their own when they are more than capable of doing so. This is particularly so when the work set is just at the right level of challenge.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- work is accurately pitched to challenge pupils in mathematics
- pupils are encouraged to work on their own and to read for pleasure
- leaders work more closely with secondary mainstream schools, so that all achievement information is accessed fully
- measurable targets are set and compared to national progression rates in the school development plan
- work continues to improve attendance rates.

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

Yours sincerely

Mary Hinds

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, inspectors were able to discuss the work of the school with you, your leadership team and other staff. Inspectors observed pupils' learning in classes and subjects across the school, with senior leaders. During these observations, inspectors looked at pupils' work and spoke to them about their learning. They were able to hear pupils of different abilities read. Inspectors met with pupils to discuss their views about all aspects of school life. Discussions were held with two members of the management committee and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors looked at a range of school documents, including the checks on staff's suitability to work with children and the school's information about pupils' progress, attainment and attendance. There were no staff or pupil responses to the Ofsted questionnaires. However, the school's staff questionnaire was checked. There were insufficient responses to Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents) for these to be considered.