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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Ms Nicolette Sorba
Acting Headteacher
Wapping High School
153 Commercial Road
London
E1 2DA

Dear Ms Sorba

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Wapping High School

Following my visit to your school on 3 May 2017, 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 being taken 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 May 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in May 2016, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that all policies and procedures relating to pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are up to date, conform to statutory requirements, and are ratified by the governing body
- resolve the impasse with the local authority so that it does not impede the school's or the local authority's responsibilities or have an adverse effect on pupils' development.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, a selected panel of pupils, members of the governing body and officers from Tower Hamlets local authority. The school improvement plan was seen. Other documents were scrutinised. Pupils' assessment data was considered. Visits were made to ten lessons in all year groups and across the curriculum.

Context

In September 2016, a new chair of the governing body was elected. September 2016 also saw changes of teaching staff. New appointments included a senior leader for mathematics and assessment. In April 2017, the headteacher unexpectedly went on extended leave at short notice. In her absence, you are acting headteacher.

Main findings

A key focus of my visit was the school's work with pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This is because the May 2016 inspection identified that exclusion and absence rates for these pupils were too high. The inspection also highlighted inconsistent classroom support for these pupils.

Visits to lessons showed that these concerns remain. In their planning, most teachers identify which pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, the detail with which these are recorded and specific learning strategies are deployed is variable. More emphasis appears to be placed on managing pupils' behaviour than on their learning. I saw bespoke guidance being used to support a pupil who has an education, health and care (EHC) plan in one of the 10 lessons sampled. In one class, a learning support assistant worked away from the main class to support a small group of pupils who have special educational needs through targeted questioning. In contrast, in another class, pupils' special educational needs were not identified in planning and, indeed, staff did not appear to know that a pupil had an EHC plan.

Leaders acknowledge that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are not currently making sufficiently rapid progress across the school compared with the overall picture. Inspection evidence shows that significant weaknesses in the strategic leadership of special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities underpin this underachievement. The school's policy for SEN and disability is extremely out of date. A revised document was presented at the end of my visit but this is also out of date and, in any case, was in draft form and had not been ratified by governors.

I was not able to visit the 'inclusion room' during my visit. Conversations with pupils

and with staff indicated that this room serves a multitude of purposes, including for pupils who have behaved poorly. Internal isolation of pupils is mentioned in the school's behaviour policy, but no detail is given about the use of the 'inclusion room' to isolate pupils.

The local authority has a statutory responsibility for the education and well-being of its pupils who have an EHC plan, wherever they are educated. The local authority is also responsible for providing pupils with appropriate education if they have been excluded for longer than five days. My meeting with local authority officers and discussions with school leaders confirmed that the school and local authority are in dispute about these arrangements. Additionally, a small number of parents have complained about the school's SEN and disability provision, including to Ofsted.

While it is not the place of Ofsted to adjudicate between the different sides or in individual cases, my view is that this situation is detrimental to pupils' progress and welfare. I was shown and told of case studies of pupils who have transferred out of Wapping High School over the past year. A number of these pupils have been temporarily and repeatedly excluded, including for three weeks or more. The school's view is that the open-plan building and/or the school's learning ethos are not suited to the behavioural needs of some pupils. I am not certain that these are the only reasons why pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have struggled, as I have explained. Furthermore, I am not convinced that appropriate arrangements have been made in every case to ensure that pupils excluded for longer than five days have had appropriate access to education. While the total number of exclusions this year has decreased slightly compared with 2015/2016, two thirds of these exclusions are of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Similarly, attendance of pupils who have EHC plans is still too low, with one in every five days missed on average. The majority of these absences are unauthorised.

Given the issues raised in the last inspection report, it is surprising that SEN and disability provision is not given prominence in the school development plan. Similarly, it is noticeable that the school's behaviour policy does not acknowledge the school's legal duties under the Equality Act 2010, in respect of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Another key focus of my visit was to consider the use of assessment information, both by leaders and by classroom teachers. This is because the May 2016 inspection judged that outcomes were too variable across groups of pupils. At that time, inspectors reported that teachers were not using assessment information consistently enough when planning lessons to meet the needs of all pupils.

The school's self-evaluation states that a strong set of GCSE results is expected this summer for the first Year 11 cohort, in terms of passes at the equivalent of grade C or above. In our meetings, we agreed that, with such small groups of pupils,

assessment information about pupils' performance is likely to be subject to wide confidence intervals and should therefore be treated with care. Therefore, my interest was in the way in which the school's internal assessments are organised and how they are used in practice by teachers.

There is no doubt that the school makes regular collections and analyses of pupils' performance data. The new assistant headteacher oversees a system of 'data-drops'. These are used to produce 'raising achievement plans' for any pupil thought to be underachieving. Small-group interventions have been introduced in Year 11. While the school's information suggests improvements in the progress made since September 2016, this also suggests wide gaps in the performance of different groups of pupils – with boys and White British pupils still not faring well.

In practice, assessment information continues to be used inconsistently in the classroom. The use of assessment information selected by teachers to plan and to track pupils' progress varies widely. Some teachers refer to pupils' starting points but others do not. For example, in one Year 11 class sampled there was a lack of clarity about pupils' targets; furthermore, understanding about pupils' progress was inconsistent with the information presented. Coupled with the variable understanding about the learning needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and, indeed, about pupils who speak English as an additional language, I was not convinced that assessment information is being used consistently well in practice across the school.

I acknowledge that some strengths were seen during my visit, including the commitment of governors and staff to the school's cause. I was impressed with the articulate maturity of the older members of the pupil panel. Behaviour seen during visits to lessons was compliant; teachers appeared confident and knowledgeable when presenting to their classes.

Nevertheless, this monitoring visit raised some questions about the school's capacity for further improvement. The number of pupils on the school roll is well below expectations. Current pupils benefit from smaller class sizes than typically seen in secondary schools but, conversely, the range of subjects offered remains limited. Since the last inspection, some key stage 4 pupils have been withdrawn from modern languages lessons in order to receive additional literacy and numeracy sessions. The school is proposing to offer BTEC courses instead of GCSEs in some key stage 4 areas, but this does not represent a broadening of subject choices.

Because of my findings and because only one governor was able to attend the feedback at the end of my visit, I will return to the school as soon as can be arranged to meet with the full governing body. This letter will also be used to consider the timing of the school's next section 5 inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools

commissioner and the director of children's services for Tower Hamlets. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector