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Ms Jeanette Lowe
Director
Camden Centre for Learning (CCfL) Special School
Harmood Street
Camden
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Dear Ms Lowe

Short inspection of Camden Centre for Learning (CCfL) Special School

Following my visit to the school on 3 May 2017 with Gary Pocock, 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 January 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. In autumn 2016, leaders launched 'learning communities' as a way of identifying and sharing the best teaching practice. You decided to use coaching and mentoring to encourage and support staff in sharing their expertise. Training for teaching and support staff is personalised to match what they need to improve about their individual teaching. As a result, teachers and supporting adults are becoming more skilled at matching activities to pupils' needs and abilities. This is ensuring that pupils are making good or better progress from their starting points, particularly in English and mathematics. Almost all staff who completed the Ofsted survey strongly agreed or agreed that their training was both challenging and supportive. You recognise that the work of the 'learning communities' in developing best practice needs further time to become embedded across the school.

The local authority decided to move the education for pupils who have more complex needs back into local authority schools, including CCfL. To help your school manage this process, there has been improvement in the school's facilities and resources, enabling the school to offer a wider range of accredited courses for pupils. This includes courses in catering, health and fitness, and hairdressing and barbering. The facilities and training provided to staff are helping the school to meet effectively the increasingly complex needs of some pupils attending the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders are proactive in educating pupils about how to manage the risks they face in their local and surrounding areas. These include gang affiliation and knife crime, and there is high-quality work with the girls' group to educate them on child sexual exploitation. Leaders have put in place a well-designed safeguarding curriculum that rightly focuses on the whole child. Advice on healthy diets, nutrition, alcohol and drug misuse is effectively delivered to pupils, with support from external professionals where required.

Pupils are protected from harm because the school has a range of experienced staff who share information and discuss pupils' welfare. Adults make decisions quickly, for example at the weekly 'multi-agency response meeting', about any support that is needed by pupils or their families. The focus on support for families as well as individual pupils is making a significant difference to improving the attendance and emotional well-being of pupils. Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that record keeping is of high quality.

Staff have thorough training on safeguarding, including the use of physical restraint. Adults are effective in managing pupils' behaviour and ensuring that boundaries and expectations are made clear. The regular surveys of parents' views for both key stages 3 and 4 show that all parents who responded stated that their child was safe and well looked after. In the words of a parent who contacted the inspection team, 'I am genuinely emotional and full of pride at who CCfL has helped my son become. My son is pursuing his dreams and passions as he is being taught in a way he can understand and remember.' Pupils' surveys show that most pupils feel safe at the school. The focus of leaders on ensuring that pupils discuss and resolve their differences is helping them to better understand the consequences of their behaviour and how to avoid future conflict.

Inspection findings

- We agreed to focus on the effectiveness of leaders' actions in improving attendance and reducing exclusions. This is because attendance was an area for improvement from the previous inspection. Your self-evaluation of the school also identified attendance as one of the priorities for further improvement.
- Leaders revised the attendance policy in the autumn term. The changes made included rewards for pupils to encourage them to improve their attendance. Leaders also focused on more systematic tracking of attendance and improving their work with families. The work with families is helping the school to meet the needs of the family and put in place appropriate support strategies.
- As a result of the school's work, attendance at key stage 3 is significantly higher than at key stage 4. The careful tracking of pupils' attendance from their 'baseline' attendance at their previous school shows that in many cases, pupils' attendance has improved. You recognise that, particularly at key stage 4, there is further work to do in matching courses more appropriately to meet some pupils' complex needs.

- We also agreed to evaluate the reliability of assessment information and whether the quality of teaching is improving, particularly in science. We wanted to see how leaders accurately identify pupils' abilities when they start at the school and whether staff judgements on pupils' progress are reliable. Equally, pupils' progress previously in science has not been as strong as in English and mathematics.
- Leaders use a range of ways to establish accurately pupils' needs and abilities. This includes information in relation to their spelling, reading, comprehension and mathematics, alongside the needs stipulated in their education, health and care plan. Through joint observations with senior leaders and looking at pupils' work, we established that pupils were making at least good progress in mathematics and English from their different starting points. In English, for example, pupils were able to apply their understanding and correctly use punctuation and spelling in their writing. Pupils were able to show that they understood the characters from their reading of 'Billionaire Boy'.
- However, we agreed that standards were lower in key stage 3 science. Pupils' understanding of the concepts they were learning was limited. Work was not well matched to pupils' starting points, particularly for the most able pupils. Science at key stage 4 was more challenging and pupils were working at the right level for their abilities. Some staffing issues have affected the quality of teaching in science. You have appropriate plans in place to help pupils at key stage 3 to catch up.
- We saw the impact of your work to improve teaching. The focus in the autumn term of training for staff in how to match work more effectively to pupils' needs was seen in pupils' work and our observations of learning. One of the pupils who spoke to inspectors stated that adults at the school, 'know me well and help us learn'. Another said, 'we practise, practise, practise'.
- Teachers adapt their teaching methods to suit how pupils learn best. In a physical education lesson for instance, the teacher chose to use role play. This strategy helped the pupils to demonstrate what they had learned about customer service in a health and fitness setting. We agreed that your strategies to develop the best teaching practice need further time to become embedded so that there is high-quality teaching across all subjects in the school.
- Lastly, we looked at the curriculum being offered to the pupils at the school and how this was effectively preparing pupils for the next steps in their education, training or employment. We agreed to explore how the curriculum helped pupils to improve their attendance. The school's self-evaluation had also identified that leaders were exploring further accredited courses that suited the needs and aspirations of pupils.
- For pupils in key stage 3, you have created a nurture group to support pupils in developing positive learning behaviours and to give them a structured and consistent approach to their learning. As a result, pupils establish relationships with teachers and adults quickly. They are more ready to learn, for example, in taking turns and when to speak out, and have become more confident.

- Where pupils need an individualised curriculum, adults create a bespoke programme for the pupil, carefully matched to their needs. A range of opportunities to accredit pupils while they learn, such as level 1 work-related courses and functional skills at levels 1 and 2, ensures that pupils are learning valuable life skills as well as improving their literacy and numeracy.
- Last year, a small number of pupils left Year 11 and were not in education, training or employment. We agreed that at key stage 4, leaders need to match the curriculum more effectively to meet some pupils' complex needs. This is particularly true where poor attendance is holding back their readiness for the next stage of their education, training or employment.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue to improve attendance, particularly for individual pupils at key stage 4, by ensuring that the curriculum is more effectively matched to pupils' complex needs
- embed the school's strategies to share best teaching practice for teachers and support staff so they match learning activities more precisely to pupils' different abilities.

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

Yours sincerely

Sam Hainey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors carried out the following activities during the inspection:

- meetings with you, other senior and middle leaders, representatives from the governing body, a representative from the local authority and the school's improvement partner
- visits to lessons with senior leaders on both sites and across all year groups
- looking at pupils' work with senior leaders to evaluate learning over time
- meeting small groups of pupils to talk about their views
- evaluation of information provided by the school, including a range of safeguarding documentation, attendance information, exclusion records, bullying logs, the school's self-evaluation, and information about pupils' progress and their abilities when pupils start at the school

- talking to pupils and staff informally throughout the school day
- consideration of the views of 18 responses to the staff survey. There were no replies to the parent or pupil surveys
- evaluating the views expressed by pupils and parents through the regular surveys undertaken by school leaders
- consideration of a letter written by a parent to the inspection team.