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Sue Raven  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Raven

### **Short inspection of The Centre School**

Following my visit to the school on 26 January 2017, 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 May 2013.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. There have been significant changes to the academy structure and leadership team since the last inspection. The Centre School now operates independently as a separate school from Cottenham Village College. You have been appointed as the headteacher and are directly accountable to a single local governing body for the school. The executive headteacher provides you with support and oversees your work and you have reorganised leadership arrangements in order to strengthen the team. This reorganisation is having a positive impact on the learning and well-being of pupils and the effectiveness with which your staff are managing the most vulnerable pupils in the school.

Your close work with families through the good communication between home and school is having a positive impact on pupils' behaviour and attendance. Pupils' behaviour is a key strength of the school. Pupils listen carefully to staff and enjoy a wide range of activities in school and within the community. Pupils enthusiastically participate in all activities, including examination courses, motor vehicle maintenance, catering, outdoor adventurous activities, fishing and theatre trips.

You, the executive headteacher and your leaders have a clear view of the strengths and areas for improvement in the school. I can see how well you have developed strong teamwork among your dedicated and committed staff to promote pupils' learning and well-being. All leaders are proud of the school and your staff's efforts to improve pupils' outcomes. Pupils say how much their

attitudes to learning and their behaviour have improved since joining the school. They know the positive impact this is having on their progress and achievements. Pupils are well motivated, focused on their activities and very well behaved. I was most impressed with their confidence and enthusiasm for learning. Clearly, your work in re-engaging disaffected pupils with learning is greatly benefiting them. Your house leaders highlighted the benefits of the new house system on pupils' outcomes.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

All staff are dedicated to ensuring the safety and welfare of pupils. They maintain high levels of supervision throughout the day. They support and participate with pupils in breaktime and lunchtime activities. As a result, pupils rightly say that they feel safe and happy in school. Leaders have rigorous systems in place to check the suitability of all staff and visitors to work with children. They have ensured that all policies and training in safeguarding are up to date. Staff new to the school benefit from induction training in related aspects of safeguarding such as child protection, anti-bullying, safe handling and the 'Prevent' duty. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

Leaders carefully assess all potential risks to pupils when they pursue activities in school and in the community. Then they put in place effective strategies to reduce any risk to pupils. You have developed good systems for recording any concerns and have implemented detailed systems to track pupils' attendance and punctuality in school. You work closely with parents and the local authority to ensure that pupils attend regularly. As a result, pupils' attendance rapidly improves as they move through the school. The school's systems for recording incidents of concern are very well developed. Leaders effectively use the information that this system generates to highlight any patterns in, for example, challenging behaviour and develop strategies to minimise and prevent this from occurring again.

In discussion, staff, parents and the local authority confirmed that pupils' behaviour rapidly improves during their time in school. One parent said, 'My son is a different boy and I can't praise the staff enough for helping him to improve his behaviour and attendance. He is now doing GCSEs which he could never have done before.'

### **Inspection findings**

- A key focus for my inspection was on how effectively the school deals with high rates of persistent absence to effectively safeguard pupils. Your records show that the high rates of persistent absence are due to the poor attendance of a small number of pupils. Your analysis of attendance data shows that a few pupils have low rates of attendance because of medical issues, which affects the overall figures.
- You have taken measures to reduce the above average number of fixed-term

exclusions through counselling and support within the new house teams. Your analysis shows that exclusion rates are falling. Although attendance is still low, it is steadily rising and most pupils are making rapid progress in improving their attendance.

- The improvement in attendance of pupils who are persistently absent is good. Your information shows that the attendance rates of children looked after have improved sharply this year because your work with families and outside agencies is effective.
- Another area of focus related to the quality of learning in lessons and how effectively teachers are implementing the school's feedback policy by providing feedback for all groups of pupils on how well they are doing. During our visits to lessons with you and the executive headteacher, we saw pupils focusing on their learning activities, listening carefully and following instructions. They were all working quickly and building their knowledge, skills and understanding over time. Leaders have developed detailed tracking systems to record the progress pupils make across their subjects. The majority of teachers use these well to show the progress of all groups of pupils. However, leaders are not checking that these systems are used consistently across the school to track the progress of all pupils.
- Another area of focus related to the effectiveness of the new curriculum in preparing pupils for the next stage of their education. During visits to lessons and community-based activities with leaders, we saw how much pupils were enjoying learning. A few pupils with previously poor attendance were engrossed in their work experience activities in the local garage and local café, displaying high levels of confidence and taking pride in their achievements. These experiences are helping them to prepare for the world of work. Pupils and parents confirmed that their children are building confidence and greatly enjoy the rich range of activities on offer.
- The curriculum is clearly having a positive impact on improving attendance as pupils engage in activities they enjoy. It prepares most pupils well for the next stage of their education. This is reflected in the large majority of pupils who go on to college, employment or training. You have increased the range of GCSE and BTEC examination courses at key stage 4 and options to motivate pupils in learning and prepare them well for life beyond school. You have also successfully introduced the 'Gateway Scheme', which facilitates the curriculum well by including examination courses in art, physical education, public services, construction, motor vehicle maintenance and hospitality.
- Pupils in Year 9 have good opportunities to prepare for future examination courses by working towards entry-level certificates. This builds their confidence and self-esteem. You provide effective additional support to improve reading and spelling, which is resulting in pupils making accelerated progress in literacy. A few pupils who arrive late into Year 11 do not fully engage in learning.
- Finally, I checked the impact of recent changes in the way governance is organised. Your chair of governors regularly visits the school and has an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Governors are now

more sharply focused on issues such as attendance, safeguarding, teaching and achievement, which is helping to raise standards and improve pupils' personal development and well-being. Governors contribute to the school's self-evaluation and its development plan. However, they are not holding leaders to account for checking patterns of attendance across year groups and subjects and are not ensuring that this information is used to set challenging whole school targets for improvement.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- thoroughly check patterns of attendance across year groups and subjects, using the information to set challenging targets and develop strategies to improve attendance further
- make sure teachers use the new tracking system consistently to record the progress of all pupils
- develop strategies so that those in Year 11 who enter the school other than at the usual time make the same progress as their peers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of the Cottenham Academy Trust. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Declan McCarthy  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I and my colleague met with you, your executive headteacher and chair of governors to discuss progress since the previous inspection. I held a meeting with your house leaders to discuss outcomes for pupils and the impact of their work in improving outcomes and pupils' well-being. I met with two other governors including the governor for safeguarding who also serves as a director of the academy trust. My colleague met with one group of pupils, and I held informal discussions with pupils in lessons and around the school. I also held telephone discussions with five parents and a representative from the local authority. We examined the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures, the records of checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with pupils, and information relating to attendance and exclusions. I scrutinised a variety of sources of information including your self-evaluation and improvement plan and assessment information in each class. We undertook observations of learning in a variety of subjects across the school, viewed work in pupils' books, and spoke with pupils about their learning during lessons.