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24 January 2018

Mr Gerry Crook  
Headteacher  
Bowden House School  
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East Sussex  
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Dear Mr Crook

### **Short inspection of Bowden House School**

Following my visit to the school on 11 January 2018 with Emma Phillips, 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 July 2014.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, along with leaders, continue to foster a welcoming, safe and secure school, with high expectations for all pupils. Pupils are exceptionally well behaved and polite. They are respectful towards each other and staff, and the school is calm, with a good atmosphere for learning. Pupils are engaged in lessons, proud of their work and enjoy learning. They are motivated by the positive behaviour systems in place and strive to manage their own behaviour effectively.

You and your leaders are extremely proud of your staff and pupils. You are passionate about striving to improve standards and outcomes for pupils. You have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas that need improvement, and you recognise that new systems need to be embedded to further improve teaching, learning and assessment. The deputy headteacher appointed since the last inspection has brought a sense of drive and ambition to the school.

Your staff have extremely strong knowledge of the individual, holistic needs of pupils and continually demonstrate a high level of dedication and care. The effective student and family work and multidisciplinary support provided have a positive impact on your pupils' well-being; strong emotional well-being provision is evident throughout the school.

Governors are well informed and know the school and pupils very well. They too are very passionate about pupils' achievements, and confidently challenge and provide

support to you and other leaders. Parents and carers are very positive about the school, with one parent stating, 'We couldn't ask for a better school'.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements in the school are fit for purpose and meet your pupils' specific needs. Records are detailed and of a high quality. You and your team all have strong in-depth knowledge of individual pupils and an excellent awareness of risks related to these pupils' individual special educational needs (SEN).

You have effective communication systems between school, care, colleges attended by sixth-form students, and outside agencies as well as strong links with children's services in different local authorities. Your holistic approach to pupils' well-being in school helps to keep them safe.

There is at least one designated person on call at all times. This, along with regular training and highly effective communication systems within school, means that staff are confident in their ability to deal with any challenging behaviour and keep pupils safe. This is a caring school in which pupils feel safe and have a good level of awareness of how to keep themselves safe, including online.

### **Inspection findings**

- During the inspection, we worked alongside your leadership team on the following lines of enquiry:
  - how well the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils (including students in the sixth form who are educated off-site) and helps them prepare for the next stage in their education
  - the effectiveness of pupils' progress in mathematics and writing
  - how leaders ensure that all pupils, including the most able, make enough progress and are challenged.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced, with particular strengths in art and the expressive arts. The 'parallel curriculum' rightly provides Year 10 and Year 11 learners with varied opportunities to develop vocational learning and work-related skills. Pupils thoroughly enjoy and appreciate these subjects and activities, which are bespoke and wide ranging, for example working with the fire cadets and angling.
- You support pupils very well in their transition to college. The sixth-form curriculum provides learning in an age-appropriate setting, such as a local college. This helps prepare pupils for the next stage in their life and also develops their independence, so that they can travel confidently to and from college by train.
- Staff have a thorough understanding of pupils' varying needs and abilities, which helps them to tailor their learning to meet pupils' particular needs. This personalised way of working with pupils, along with support and advice from the therapeutic team, makes the curriculum accessible and engaging for all pupils.

- Pupils are making good progress in mathematics and writing. A scrutiny of pupils' work demonstrated examples of good progress over time in literacy, with particularly good progress in handwriting. Since the last inspection, you have increased the focus on mathematics and English throughout the school and are successfully tackling issues, such as progress across the school in mathematics, using external support when necessary.
- The deputy headteacher has developed a team of middle leaders who have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas that need improvement. They meet regularly to assess all pupils' progress in all areas and put interventions in place as a result of their findings. However, these leaders are new to their roles, and you recognise that they need to develop their skills. You have ambitious plans for them to have even greater impact on teaching, learning and assessment.
- Since the last inspection, you have put in place new systems to track pupils' progress and to give them more challenging, aspirational targets. You recognised that their targets were not always challenging enough. This year, they have been modified so that they can more accurately meet learners' needs. Leaders are reflective and insightful and recognise the need to continue to monitor the effectiveness of systems and make changes as necessary. Leaders have plans to moderate pupils' work with mainstream schools in the near future to ensure that their assessment systems are robust. Reading ages and spelling ages are tracked regularly and show good progress over time.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- further development of middle leaders enables them to have even greater impact on pupils' progress
- the new assessment system is fully embedded to ensure that it fully informs leaders' evaluations of teaching, learning and assessment.

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

Maxine McDonald-Taylor  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

My colleague and I met with you and other leaders. We both visited lessons in a range of subjects with your deputy headteacher. We spoke to pupils in class where

appropriate, and looked through their work with them, allowing them to explain what they were learning to us. We held meetings with key staff about the curriculum, behaviour systems, how leaders monitor pupils' progress, student and family work and safeguarding. We also met with a group of pupils to hear their views about school life. I observed pupils' lunchtime break and met with members of the education governing body. I considered responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and my colleague spoke to parents on the telephone to hear their views. We scrutinised a wide range of school documentation and a selection of pupils' work.