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Mr Neil Houchen
Principal
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Dear Mr Houchen

Short inspection of The Eastwood Academy

Following my visit to the school on 8 March 2018 with Vivien Corrie-Wing, 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

You and your senior colleagues have led the school with determination, consistency and rigour to ensure that the school lives up to its stated motto of 'Believe, Achieve, Together.' You have created a culture of very high expectations that every pupil, regardless of their background and circumstances, can succeed. You have ensured that these aspirations have been translated into strong achievement, so that pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, have made overall progress on average that is consistently well above that made by pupils on average nationally. You have achieved this by creating a culture of collaboration in which leaders at all levels, teachers, pupils, and parents and carers work together positively to secure improvement.

All pupils receive high levels of support, guidance and care and they feel highly valued. As a result, they attend well, arrive punctually, behave in an exemplary fashion and work with purpose when they are in school. Pupils are very proud of their school and clearly enjoy their education. They wholeheartedly take part in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including many which exploit the school's impressive sporting facilities. Pupils are polite and courteous to adults, and each

other. They stand unprompted when an adult enters a classroom. They move around the site in a calm and orderly fashion and treat their facilities with care and consideration.

The previous inspection report asked the school to improve the overall quality of teaching, particularly in regard to stretching the most able pupils. The school has been hugely successful in this, and the amount of progress pupils make, including that made by high-prior-attaining pupils, has improved markedly as a result. Lessons at the school routinely incorporate high levels of challenge from the outset. Pupils are expected not only to master large amounts of subject content, but also to apply it to different situations and use it to develop new ideas. They regularly write at length, demonstrating strong literacy skills.

The school has responded effectively to other areas for development highlighted in the previous inspection report. You and your senior colleagues have successfully improved teaching and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, so they now make progress that is much greater than that made by their non-disadvantaged peers on average nationally. You have reduced persistent absence so that it is lower than the national average, and this contributes to overall attendance that is very strong.

School leaders at all levels are not complacent, and are determined to ensure that these very high standards are achieved consistently across all areas of the school. They understand that it is necessary to monitor pupils' achievement systematically if high standards are to be maintained and improved further. Consequently, leaders have developed highly effective systems for tracking progress meticulously. This allows support to be put in place rapidly if any group of pupils, or even an individual pupil, appears to be falling behind. Trustees and members of the local governing body are expert and experienced in understanding this performance information, enabling them to undertake insightful discussions with school leaders about standards on a regular basis.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including trustees and governors, have a relentless focus upon ensuring the safety and well-being of pupils, in particular those who are vulnerable or at risk. This has contributed to a transparent and robust culture of safeguarding. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. All staff are aware of their role in ensuring pupils' safety and welfare. Child protection policies are clear and understood by staff. Staff have had relevant safeguarding training, which is regularly updated. As part of this training, they undertake assessment exercises to ensure that key messages have been understood.

Pupils say that they feel very safe at the school. They all say that there is an adult in the school they trust to speak to if they have a problem. The curriculum helps pupils to deal with any risks they may routinely face, including the use of the internet and social networking sites.

Pupils report that the advice they receive does help to shape their behaviour. Pupils are confident that poor behaviour, including bullying, is rare and dealt with effectively if it does occur.

Staff are quick in identifying any concerns that they have about pupils and always follow them up with due urgency. They liaise effectively with external agencies so that pupils get the support that they require quickly. Information is shared effectively with parents and carers on these occasions, and constructive working relationships with other agencies help to keep pupils safe. The school successfully coordinates the care and welfare of the small number of children looked after who attend the school.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry was to investigate the extent to which the school is effectively ensuring that this excellent overall progress is reflected in the progress made by pupils whatever their starting point. In 2017, pupils who joined the school with average and above-average attainment made progress that was significantly above that made by similar pupils nationally. However, pupils who joined with attainment that was below average made progress that was only in line with the national average. The school has clearly identified this issue in its development planning, and has introduced sensible measures to support further the progress of these pupils, for example by reducing the average class size of lower ability sets.
- The 2017 results do not fully reflect the achievements of pupils with low prior attainment. The group was very small and most within this group achieved well. The trend over the last three years indicates that pupils with low prior attainment perform as well as others, and sometimes better. The school's assessment information about pupils currently in the school shows that low-prior-attaining pupils are making very rapid progress.
- My second line of enquiry was to investigate how successfully the school is working to ensure that all subjects are making progress that is as strong as the highest performing subject areas. In 2017, progress in English was significantly above that made by pupils on average nationally; in mathematics, science and humanities, progress was in the top 10% of all schools nationally. However, in modern foreign languages, progress over time has only been broadly in line with national averages, and in a very small number of other subjects, such as music, progress has not been consistently above average.
- School leaders were able to explain a range of strategies that have been put in place to promote consistently positive outcomes across all subjects. They have strengthened systems for checking and improving the quality of teaching. This includes constructing a programme of training that is meticulously tailored to the specific needs of individual staff and clearly articulating and sharing the essential common features of an excellent lesson at The Eastwood Academy. The school's own performance information suggests that these strategies are having a positive impact on accelerating pupils' progress and raising their attainment.

- I was also keen to investigate the impact on performance of the way the curriculum is structured. Leaders and governors are entirely committed to providing a curriculum with sufficient breadth and balance. They have continually evaluated the curriculum and worked hard to increase the range of options open to pupils. They have also strengthened the curriculum to ensure that all pupils take high-value academic subjects such as humanities and modern foreign languages. Pupils feel that they are well guided and supported in the choices they make at the end of key stage 3, which is during Year 8 at this school.
- However, the curriculum could be strengthened even more. School leaders acknowledge that increasing the number of vocational and science GCSE courses on offer would enhance the range of appropriate choices for a small number of pupils at key stage 4. Pupils receive insufficient curriculum time in modern foreign languages in key stage 3 and this can hold some pupils back from making very rapid progress across the school in this subject.
- My final line of enquiry was to investigate how successfully the school has reduced the number of pupils who are given fixed-term exclusions. This is because this was an area for improvement highlighted in the 2013 inspection report and reiterated after Ofsted visited again in 2015 specifically to look at behaviour. It was pointed out then that rates of fixed-term exclusion were higher than the national average.
- School leaders have acted effectively, and with due urgency, since 2015. They have spread responsibility for behaviour and discipline across the entire senior team, and ensured that lines of communication and accountability were very clear between the pastoral 'houses' and senior leadership, so that any poor behaviour could be addressed rapidly before it escalated. As a result, incidents of poor behaviour have declined and, in 2016, fixed-term exclusions fell well below the national average. The school's own information shows that this improvement has been sustained both in 2016/17 and for the current academic year.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the progress made in every subject at key stage 4 is consistently above the national average for that subject
- the curriculum is enhanced further to ensure that it supports very rapid pupil progress across all subjects.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the Eastwood Park Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Southend-on-Sea. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Lawrence
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors held meetings with you, other school leaders, teachers, trustees, governors, and various groups of pupils. We observed pupils' learning in a series of short visits to a number of lessons, and all of these visits were conducted jointly with members of the school's leadership team. We scrutinised a range of school documentation including: policies; the school's self-evaluation; the school's improvement plan; safeguarding records; and information about pupils' achievement, behaviour and attendance. We considered the views expressed in 103 responses by parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 98 free-text responses, together with 81 questionnaires returned by pupils and 52 returned by school staff.