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Dear Ms Costello

Short inspection of Ormiston Rivers Academy

Following my visit to the school on 27 September 2016 with Sally Nutman, 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Ormiston Rivers Academy is an industrious environment, where staff and pupils work together harmoniously and without complacency. Pupils achieve and behave well. You and your team, most notably your vice-principals, have worked tirelessly, to raise the aspirations of your pupils, your staff and the community. You have transformed the ethos of your school. This was recognised in your inspection in July 2013, and you have continued to improve the school since this time.

Pupils' performance at key stage 4 continues to rise. In 2016, examination results indicate rapid improvement in some areas, such as science, where achievement was not as good previously. Equally, the number of pupils who achieved grade C in both English and mathematics in 2016 has also risen considerably. Many pupils enter the school with attainment that is lower than the national average. From this starting point they make good, and sometimes better, progress. As a result, although some weaker teaching still exists, overall teaching is effective in enabling pupils to achieve well.

You have creatively overcome your recruitment difficulties to establish high-quality leadership and effective teaching. You and your leadership team actively talent spot and nurture potential in your school staff. I spoke with teachers who are new to the profession. Many of them were spotted by your leaders, doing other jobs in the

school, and were encouraged and supported to qualify as teachers. You are rightly proud of your training for staff and how many of your leaders are 'home-grown'.

Your staff are very proud to be part of the Ormiston Rivers Academy team. Almost all of the staff who completed Ofsted's online survey were positive in their praise for the improvements you have brought to the school. Staff are 'buzzing' with energy and enthusiasm, and work effectively to improve standards for pupils. Newly qualified teachers say that the support they receive from your leaders and other staff is exemplary. They say that they are constantly improving the quality of what they do because of the intensive support they receive from their mentors and department teams. This helps teachers who are new to the profession to improve their classroom management techniques to develop positive relationships with pupils.

Pupils are courteous young people who welcome visitors happily to their very attractive and well-maintained school. Pupils appreciate the work of the staff and try hard in lessons because they want to do well. The school is becoming increasingly popular in the local area and the number of pupils joining the school is rising year on year. This can sometimes be felt in the corridors, where the space is sometimes tight when pupils are moving between lessons. However, pupils walk through the school corridors in a calm and orderly way.

Parents are effusive in their praise for the school, and particularly for you as the principal. Almost all of the 72 parents who completed Ofsted's online survey would recommend the school. A small minority of parents and pupils raised some concerns about behaviour and teaching, although inspection evidence does not suggest that these concerns typically reflect pupils' experience.

You have successfully acted on all the areas identified for improvement since the previous inspection.

- Reading is now a central part of pupils' daily timetables. Inspectors listened to pupils read and spoke to pupils about their experiences of reading. They were very positive about reading. The creation of your 'Learning Resource Centre' has also enabled pupils to access more reading material in a pleasant environment. You have recently implemented a programme to ensure that your most-able pupils in key stage 3 get more exposure to classic texts, so that they can continue to enjoy a rich, varied reading experience.
- Feedback to pupils has also continued to improve, although there remains some inconsistency, especially around the presentation of some pupils' work. Pupils say that they get clear guidance in most lessons, so they know how to improve. Inspection evidence confirms this to be the case.
- Published past data for mathematics shows that pupils have made progress that is broadly in line with the national average. However, the most able pupils have not always attained the highest grades. Results in 2016 show an improvement in the outcomes at A* to C grade, with a rise in the numbers of pupils achieving a grade A or an A*. This is the result of effective leadership and improved teaching.

You have focused intensely on improving science, while maintaining the expectation that every child will have access to at least two sciences. Although published data shows weaker performance in 2014 and 2015, results have risen considerably in 2016. New effective leadership and improving teaching are now starting to fill the gaps in pupils' knowledge caused by less consistent teaching previously. Leaders rightly acknowledge that some teaching still needs to improve further and that there is still work to do to diminish the differences in outcomes between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally. Leaders in science are not complacent and continue to be aspirational for pupils. They accurately identify that although they have raised the number of pupils in triple science attaining the highest grades at GCSE, this is not yet as high as it could be.

Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well. This is because you and other leaders invest heavily in their provision. Your team work closely with local primary schools as well as parents to make sure that you know your pupils before they start with you. Before they arrive, you accurately identify those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities who did not attain the required standards in reading, writing and mathematics. You use your 'Wings' provision in Years 7 and 8 to provide these pupils with literacy and numeracy intervention to help get them to the acquired standards. Pupils who spend time in the 'Wings' area develop better communication, improve their behaviour and learn important life skills. For example, the garden that they dig over and care for, growing plants and food, helps them to practically apply their scientific learning while being involved in the school community. As a result, they successfully access a broad and balanced curriculum. In 2015, they achieved qualifications in a number of subjects and made progress that was above the national average, most notably in English.

Leadership of the sixth form has been diligent in establishing 'real' improvements, and not just 'quick fixes'. Your leader is insistent about creating a better curriculum 'for the community'. He listens to students, looks at the local community and the national picture, and is thoughtful about students' aspirations when creating a well-thought out curriculum. New work-related options support those who wish to become accountants, legal secretaries and engineers, while the on-site motor vehicles provision is being accessed by increasing numbers of students. This means that pupils are now accessing courses that directly support them on to their next stages in training and employment.

A larger proportion of your students now stay on in the sixth form and are succeeding on their original courses of choice. More students are also going onto further education, training or employment. These changes are beginning to make a difference to results, most notably in vocational courses, but also at AS and A level. Disadvantaged pupils' achievement is also now improving. There is still further work to do on ensuring that more students access work experience that is related to their aspirations and courses.

School leaders actively welcome high-quality support and challenge from the local governing body, the regional director from Ormiston Academies Trust and the local authority standards and excellence commissioner. You feel that this support has

made a real difference in helping you to raise standards, and inspection evidence confirms this to be the case.

Safeguarding is effective.

The curriculum ensures that pupils know how to stay safe, especially online. You use visitors, assemblies and lessons to keep pupils and parents up to date with the most recent guidance. Many pupils told inspectors that the external visitors that give talks about online safety make them even more careful in what they access on the internet and social media. The work of the family welfare officer provided by 'Ormiston Children and Families' is thorough and meticulous. This provides some of the most vulnerable pupils, and their families, with a place to go regularly to deal with their, often complex, issues.

You undertake thorough and regular checks of all of your staff. Governors routinely double-check the single central record of recruitment checks, to make sure that pupils are safe. Attendance is monitored well, especially for those pupils who are children looked after. This means that any concerns about pupils' attendance are dealt with promptly and the appropriate external agencies are involved.

Staff are vigilant and professional about their responsibility to keep pupils safe. Training is effective in giving staff the most up-to-date information about the possible signs of abuse. They use this training to make referrals to the designated safeguarding leader. Referrals to children's services are timely and appropriate. However, some of the paperwork in pupils' files is not sufficiently detailed. It does not reflect the high quality practice in the school. You are aware of this and the work of your new designated safeguarding lead in establishing more rigorous systems for recording is already making a difference to this area of your work.

Inspection findings

- Leaders know the school well. Your self-evaluation accurately identifies its strengths and weaknesses. You and your vice-principals have ensured that leaders are knowledgeable about all aspects of school improvement. Support and information from the local governing body, the trust and the local authority are used to quality assure your judgements. Occasionally, leaders are not sharp enough in how they use work scrutiny and evidence of pupils' progress when making judgements about the quality of teaching, especially when checking on the progress of your most-able pupils.
- Achievement continues to improve at key stage 4. In 2015, published information about the school's key stage 4 outcomes show that your pupils made better progress than the national average in English and humanities. Although there is currently no published national comparative data, the 2016 results suggest results that are even better than this. For the first time since the previous inspection, there has been real improvement in science results. There has also been an increase in the number of pupils who have achieved at least a grade C in both English and mathematics. Results in English and humanities continue to be strong. However, results in languages

remain low. You have recruited a new team of staff to teach and lead in the department over the last 18 months, and early indications from pupils' current assessments would suggest that this area is starting to improve.

- Disadvantaged pupils achieved well at key stage 4 in 2015, particularly in English, where they made better progress from their starting points than pupils did nationally. However, 2016 results show that although slightly more disadvantaged pupils achieved at least a grade C in English and mathematics, other pupils progressed more rapidly to attain similar grades. However, the small number of the most able disadvantaged pupils in the school in 2016 achieved a high proportion of A and A* grades in 2016.
- Published data from 2015 would suggest that the most able pupils in the school do not always achieve as well as they could. However, there was an increase in the numbers of A and A* grades achieved in 2016 results and a rise in the number of pupils achieving the English Baccalaureate measure.
- Teaching continues to improve and enables pupils to achieve well. This is because of the effective training and development programmes that are in place, overseen by the work of your senior leaders. Teaching has improved notably in mathematics and science, under the high-quality line management of your vice-principal.
- Teaching and achievement in English and the humanities remain strong. You know that there are still some examples of teaching in the school that is not yet good, where pupils are not making appropriate progress and where they occasionally become disengaged with their learning.
- Leaders have undertaken sustained work to improve attendance. The overall attendance of pupils is slightly better than the national average. Past published information, as well as school evidence on attendance in 2016, shows that attendance continues to improve year on year for all groups of pupils, while persistent absence continues to reduce. However, leaders acknowledge that the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, while improving, is once again unlikely to reach the national average.
- The sixth form is making effective strides in its development under effective leadership. A larger proportion of pupils go onto university, and increasing numbers are getting into some of the best universities in the country. Leaders identified that results at AS level in 2015 were not as good as they would like and set about improving these. 2016 results show improvements at AS, A level and in vocational options. Pupils have performed particularly well in the CACHE diploma in childcare, humanities, media, sport and the performing arts.
- Pupils who need to resit their GCSE English and mathematics are being given timetabled lessons and are having success in improving their grades. Leaders have rightly identified that this could still be improved. Recruitment and retention in the sixth form is improving year on year, through high-quality independent careers advice and guidance. However, leaders also acknowledge that while pupils have access to work experience and work-related learning, pupils' current work experience is not always as appropriate to their aspirations or courses as it should be.
- The school complies with Department of Education guidance on what academies should publish on their website.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all of your paperwork around safeguarding reflects the good work that the school does in this area
- your effective leaders in the sixth form and in modern foreign languages continue to improve provision and outcomes for pupils and students
- all teaching is good or better, using your wealth of strong teaching to support this
- you continue to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils so that it reaches at least the national average.

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

Yours sincerely

Kim Pigram
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

From the pre-inspection review of published information and the school's information online, inspectors had four lines of enquiry that they chose to test during the inspection day. These were:

- How far have leader secured sustained improvements, most notably in the progress that pupils make in science, mathematics and languages, and for the most able in a range of subjects?
- How far have leaders secured improved attendance and reduced persistent absence for disadvantaged pupils?
- How far have leaders secured improvements in the sixth-form provision?
- How far have leaders acted on the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection, most notably in teaching, reading, feedback and mathematics?

During the inspection, inspectors spoke with you, your vice-principals and other representatives from the leadership team. We also spoke with pupils, both formally and informally, and students in the sixth form. We met with the chair of the local governing body, the regional director for the south from the Ormiston Academies Trust and the standards and excellence commissioner from the local authority. We visited classrooms, undertook a scrutiny of pupils' work, and observed pupils at break and lesson changeover. We listened to some pupils read and talked to them about their experiences of reading in the school. We reviewed responses to Ofsted's online questionnaires, Parent View, Staff View and Pupil View. We also reviewed an

array of school documentation. This included documentation related to safeguarding, children looked after and the alternative provision used by a small group of pupils in Year 11 on a part-time basis.