

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Ms Emma Skae
Principal
Walthamstow Academy
Billet Road
Walthamstow
London
E17 5DP

Dear Ms Skae

Short inspection of Walthamstow Academy

Following my visit to the school on 26 September 2017 with Her Majesty's Inspector Charlotte Robinson, 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 March 2014.

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 both high expectations and the drive to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. Governors are ambitious for the school and fully support your commitment to improvement. Leaders, including the governing body, receive a good level of support and challenge from the United Learning Trust, closely matched to the school's needs.

Pupils know that their teachers expect highly of them, both academically and personally, and this encourages them to try their best. Most pupils behave well and have a full understanding of the rules and expectations of the school.

One marked feature of the school is that under your leadership there is a clear sense of purpose and direction to develop 'the best in everyone'. You rigorously check and evaluate all aspects of the school's work. Where you have identified weaknesses, you plan effective actions to ensure that standards remain good.

You have successfully addressed the areas for improvement raised at the previous inspection. The two main recommendations were to improve teaching and raise the progress of sixth-form students in their academic studies.

You are raising standards in the quality of teaching and learning by setting aspirational targets both for staff and for pupils. Staff receive appropriate training, and value the joint working partnership with other schools in the United Learning

Trust. This helps them to work collaboratively and share good practice. The success of your actions is evident in that pupils make at least good progress at the end of key stage 4. Similarly, in 2016, the progress of most students taking AS and A level subjects was above the national average.

The majority of parents' views about the school are positive. They say their children are well looked after, taught well, and that they make good progress at the school. A minority of those who responded to the online parent survey said that communication between home and school could be better to support the learning needs of their child.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have created a culture where safeguarding receives the utmost attention, as it so rightly deserves. Recruitment systems are rigorous, as demonstrated by the detailed single central record of employment checks. Together, the leadership team and governors have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

Staff are suitably trained, including several designated as safeguarding leads, to maintain an awareness about child protection issues. Regular training updates include how to identify and combat extremism and radicalisation.

You provide pupils with learning opportunities so they know how to keep themselves safe. Pupils are confident to approach their teachers, and are encouraged to use the 'worry table' or 'bullying box' should they need help. Staff are vigilant, and pupils feel safe under their care. An effective electronic system enables staff to alert safeguarding officers immediately should they have a concern. A senior leader with overall responsibility for safeguarding ensures that actions from referrals are followed up quickly to check that pupils are supported and safe. Leaders work closely with parents and external agencies so that vulnerable pupils receive early help.

Inspection findings

- To confirm that the school remained good, we agreed to focus on five aspects of the school's work. The first line of enquiry was to review the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding arrangements. These are, as reported above, very secure.
- We then examined the challenge pupils received in their learning. In 2016, the progress made by high-attaining disadvantaged pupils in Year 11 was slower than that found nationally.
- You have introduced an effective teaching model to reinforce your high expectations for pupils' learning. In the learning activities visited, we saw examples of pupils being appropriately challenged. Tasks set and effective questioning encourage pupils to think more deeply. Our observations, including scrutiny of pupils' work, supported the improvements identified in the provisional 2017 results. The most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, make

good progress, including in English and mathematics.

- A third line of enquiry looked at how leaders and managers promote good behaviour. In 2016, published information suggested that the exclusion rate of pupils was much higher than that seen nationally. Although the persistent absence rate for all pupils was average, the figure for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged was higher than the national average.
- Leaders have maintained a sharp focus on addressing high absence rates. The appointment of relevant staff has ensured that pupils and their families receive support to attend school more regularly. Effective approaches, including home visits, are proving successful, and the proportion of pupils who were persistently absent is reducing. Even so, a handful of parents need more encouragement to enable their children to attend school more regularly.
- Exclusions are reducing. You have provided staff with training opportunities, including using restorative conversations to address pupils' challenging behaviour. Inspectors saw a consistent approach to promote positive pupil attitudes. Pupils' conduct within their learning activities is better than around the school. A few pupils were seen to be loitering in the corridors and were slow to attend their lesson on time. Scrutiny of records shows that despite a reduction, exclusions remain high for some pupils. Some parents expressed their worry via the parental survey about the time their child spent in the 'protected learning room'.
- We looked at the achievement of sixth-form students. This was an area for improvement from the previous inspection. Inspectors held discussions with leaders and students, and scrutinised records of students' destinations after leaving the school.
- Published results in 2016 and provisional results for 2017 suggest outcomes in the sixth form remain good. Students make exceptional progress in their vocational studies. Even though the attainment of academic studies dipped slightly in 2017, it demonstrates an overall improving picture. Pupils receive effective careers guidance, and many students have secured places for courses of their choice, including almost a third at top universities.
- We finally explored the progress of different groups of pupils. In 2016, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and disadvantaged pupils, made slow progress from their starting points in some subjects.
- Leaders and managers track pupils' progress closely and provide good extra support so that pupils do not fall behind in their learning. Some pupils spoke about their appreciation of their extra mathematics and English lessons, as they help them to achieve better. Provisional GCSE results in 2017 suggest an improving picture, including the progress of disadvantaged pupils being above national figures.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- exclusion and persistent absence rates, particularly of groups of pupils, continue to fall
- communication with parents improves further, so they are kept informed about all aspects of their child's education.

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

Yours sincerely

Rosemarie McCarthy
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspectors held meetings with you, senior leaders, including the designated safeguarding lead, and middle leaders throughout the day. The lead inspector also met with the chair of the governing body and a representative from the United Learning Trust. The inspectors met formally with pupils from all year groups and spoke with pupils both in and out of lessons. Inspectors made visits to lessons, a few jointly with senior leaders.

Inspectors examined the school's self-evaluation, as well as other documents, including assessment records and information about pupils' behaviour and attendance. The lead inspector examined the single central record of employment checks along with other information about safeguarding. Inspectors viewed minutes from governing body meetings. They evaluated 24 responses to the online staff survey and 47 responses to the pupil survey. Inspectors considered 33 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 32 free-text responses. Inspectors also took account of a parental survey conducted by school leaders, and spoke to a very small number of parents.