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1 February 2018

Mr Chris Brown
Principal
The Bridge Academy
Laburnum Street
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Dear Mr Brown

Short inspection of The Bridge Academy

Following my visit to the school on 15 January 2018 with Diane Khanna, 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 January 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 is strong evidence that you and your leadership team have continued to raise the achievement of your pupils regardless of their background. The school is in the top 12% of schools nationally for progress overall, and last year disadvantaged pupils at The Bridge Academy achieved marginally better than other pupils.

You believe that all pupils should experience the benefits of academic study. It is a considerable achievement by your leaders that nearly all pupils who left your sixth form last year went to university, and the majority of these were the first members of their family to do so. You are rightly working to strengthen pupil progress in mathematics.

Your leadership has secured an orderly and welcoming place to learn. Inspectors observed high standards of behaviour in lessons and around the school. You have successfully decreased the number of fixed-term exclusions, although you recognise the need to reduce these still further. Pupils appreciate how well behaviour is managed. One Year 7 pupil said: 'I enjoy school. There is a lot of respect. I have made lots of new friends.'

You and your leadership team are well supported by a strong team of governors. They visit regularly and ask appropriately challenging questions of your actions. Your sponsor, UBS, contributes expertise to enrich the experience of your pupils. For example, the whole of Year 12 was visiting the sponsor's city offices during the inspection.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that a strong culture of safeguarding is embedded in the school. Most pupils, when surveyed, responded that they feel safe and well looked after. Their parents and careers agreed. Systems are fit for purpose and records are detailed. The single central record of staff recruitment checks is comprehensive and up to date.

All staff are trained to a high level by the Hackney Learning Trust and receive regular safeguarding updates. Procedures are in place to ensure that staff joining the school during the year receive immediate training. Staff are vigilant about checking for signs that pupils may be at risk, both in school and in the wider community.

Senior staff have forged a strong partnership with Hackney social services. This ensures that any pupils causing concern are carefully monitored until the local authority is confident they are safe. Your curriculum covers key safeguarding issues with pupils, including the dangers of knife crime.

Your leaders have created a culture of mutual respect among pupils. Pupils told inspectors that they feel very safe and know whom to approach if they have a concern. They said that instances of bullying are very rare and that teachers deal with them effectively.

Inspection findings

- We first looked to see how well your strategies to reduce fixed-term exclusions, particularly of Black Caribbean pupils, are working. Fixed-term exclusions rose to nearly 11% in 2016, more than double the national rate. You said that this was a result of the school clamping down on unsafe behaviour both in and outside school. Your leaders and governors recognised that this figure was too high and that too many Black Caribbean pupils, mainly boys, were being excluded. Staff in the school's offsite provision, working with pupils to change their behaviour, have had some measurable impact. You introduced clear behaviour principles and consistent high expectations which have led to a calm and orderly school. More recently, you have started an intervention programme for Black Caribbean boys with the Hackney Learning Trust. The school's figures for recent fixed-term exclusions lack clarity, but a gradual decline in their number is evident. There have also been no permanent exclusions for the past three years. Some progress has been made in reducing fixed-term exclusions, and your leaders should continue to work to reduce them further.
- We next investigated what actions you have taken to tackle weaker pupil progress in mathematics evident in the 2017 GCSE results. The most able pupils' progress declined significantly from a strong position the year before. You have taken prompt action to change leadership and staffing in mathematics and you recognise the need to change teaching approaches to adapt to the new GCSE

syllabus. Inspectors found that teachers are using assessment well to plan next steps for pupils falling behind and are effectively correcting their misconceptions. Pupils were engaged in their mathematics lessons but are not generally confident mathematicians. Although some pupils are provided with tasks to extend their learning, lessons often lack challenge. You and your leaders think that more time is needed for improvements to take hold. Your sharper focus on underachievement in mathematics is evident, but the impact of new leadership on the overall quality of teaching is only beginning to emerge.

- We then agreed to find out how well the curriculum is meeting the needs and aspirations of pupils. Inspectors were impressed by your clear vision for the curriculum, particularly your aim to ensure that disadvantaged pupils receive the full benefits of an academic education. To support this, increasing numbers of pupils are preparing for the English Baccalaureate, and strategies are in place to improve take-up even further. You have also maintained curriculum breadth through strong provision in the arts, as well as vocational options for some pupils in key stage 4. Pupils achieve well in modern foreign languages. However, your school's own figures show variable progress in history and geography. Apart from in these subjects, your broad and balanced curriculum is having a strong impact on pupil progress.
- Finally, we decided to find out how you are working to further improve results in the sixth form. Results in 2017 show an improvement across most A-level subjects. You swiftly identified the small number of subjects in which students' progress was weaker and used a skilled sixth-form teacher in the school to coach other teachers. Your leaders in the sixth form monitor students thoroughly and have put in place robust ways of tackling underachievement. Students are now closely supervised while studying independently, and entrance criteria to courses are applied more strictly. Sixth-form students were effusive, when speaking to inspectors, about the support they receive from the school, both in terms of emotional well-being and preparation for higher education and employment. They all hold high aspirations. Although some skilful questioning was observed, inspectors also saw pupils struggling to apply knowledge and technical language. Your leaders are successfully identifying and addressing such inconsistencies.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers provide pupils with more challenge to improve outcomes in mathematics
- the school's work on reducing exclusions, particularly with Black Caribbean boys, is continued and followed through.

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

Yours sincerely

James Whiting
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors visited 14 lessons, interviewed senior leaders, governors, the school improvement partner and pupils. They observed behaviour around the school and scrutinised documentation and pupils' work.