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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mr Sunil Chotai
Headteacher
Charles Darwin School
Jail Lane
Biggin Hill
Westerham
Kent
TN16 3AU

Dear Mr Chotai

Short inspection of Charles Darwin School

Following my visit to the school on 30 January 2018 with Angela Triggs and Colin Mackinlay, Ofsted Inspectors, 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 October 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 created a safe and orderly learning environment where pupils can flourish.

You believe that all pupils should enjoy a range of educational opportunities. Speaking to inspectors, pupils were very appreciative of the range of subjects available to them to study at GCSE. Arts subjects feature strongly in a balanced curriculum. You also provide a wide range of after-school activities which pupils take advantage of, including a strong sports programme. This helps form pupils' positive attitudes to school.

Students in the sixth form spoke highly of the helpful guidance they receive on university applications. The diverse range of destinations, including Russell Group universities, is evidence of the impact of your advice. Work experience is also carefully tailored to students' interests and enthusiasms. For example, one student gained experience in a hospital and a pharmacy to help prepare them for a career in medicine. The achievement of students in the sixth form is strong in some subjects, and leaders are now focusing on those which need to improve.

Inspectors observed very high standards of behaviour in classrooms and around the school. Pupils are courteous and respectful both to staff and each other.

They collaborate well together. For example, in drama, younger pupils worked together effectively to perform a mime sequence in response to lines from 'Romeo and Juliet'. You have successfully kept the number of fixed-term exclusions below national rates and you have reduced the proportion of disadvantaged pupils being excluded. Nevertheless, persistent absence rates are still high, particularly among this group.

Your leadership has engendered very high levels of support for the school from pupils, parents and carers. A significantly high number of parents responded in Parent View and they are extremely positive about the school. Nearly all respondents would recommend Charles Darwin School to other parents. Pupils were also effusive about the support they receive from teachers when they spoke to inspectors. For example, one pupil reported, 'Our teachers are very supportive. They spend time with us to make sure we understand the work.'

You and your leadership team are well supported by a team of effective governors who are very knowledgeable about the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Although they visit regularly and receive presentations about aspects of the school, they do not always challenge leaders sufficiently.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that a strong culture of safeguarding is embedded in the school. All pupils, when asked, responded that they felt safe and well looked after. Their parents agreed. Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed. The single central record of staff recruitment checks is comprehensive and up to date. Very rare instances of bullying are dealt with promptly.

All staff are trained to an appropriate level and receive regular safeguarding updates. Pupils causing concern are carefully monitored and appropriate referrals are made. Senior staff have been effective in challenging social services when they are not satisfied with their response. Your curriculum covers key safeguarding issues with pupils, including e safety and bullying.

Inspection findings

- We first looked to see how well your strategies to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils were working. Results in 2017 showed that overall, disadvantaged pupils were making significantly low progress. You now ask teachers for regular updates on how disadvantaged pupils in their classes are doing and you carefully check that teachers discuss how to respond to their needs at all of their meetings. Your leaders also regularly check disadvantaged pupils' work to see that they are making progress in line with other pupils. Inspectors found that this strategy is having considerable impact on the progress of disadvantaged pupils.

- Visits to classrooms confirmed that disadvantaged pupils are able to answer questions and engage well in a range of activities. Work in books was, on the whole, well presented and showed that pupils make strong progress. You are using extra funding for these pupils effectively. An intervention to raise the aspirations of Year 8 pupils when choosing options through careers interviews was clearly working. A lower-school reading programme to improve literacy successfully raised the reading age of disadvantaged pupils. Teachers are also allocated funds to ensure that disadvantaged pupils have access to extra resources and do not miss out on trips. Inspectors spoke to a wide range of disadvantaged pupils and they were very positive about the support they were receiving. Overall, your work in this area is making a significant difference to the progress and well-being of these pupils.
- We next investigated what actions you have taken to tackle weaker pupil performance in modern foreign languages. This was because the 2017 GCSE examination results showed significant variation. You suggested we also look into design technology as progress in this subject had also been variable. For the past two years, GCSE results in German and French have been lower than other subjects. A robust action plan was presented to inspectors. This included strategies for teachers to place a stronger emphasis on the teaching of grammar, more target language in lessons, regular translation activities and a staged programme of vocabulary development.
- Inspectors found that these strategies were now strongly evident in classrooms and pupils' work. Teaching is now well focused in motivating pupils to succeed. Senior leaders have effectively supported the head of languages in making the necessary improvements, which are now secure. The recent mock examination results in modern foreign languages show a significant rise in good GCSE passes for the current Year 11 cohort. Inspection evidence confirms that pupils are now making strong progress in modern foreign languages.
- In design technology, teaching was effective because careful planning supported progress and successful projects in food and resistant materials. Provision in design technology is improving strongly too.
- We then agreed to find out how successful leaders are being in raising levels of attendance. Absence rates for 2015 were above national figures. Over the past few years, your work in this area has brought overall absence rates down so they are now in line with the national average. The number of pupils persistently absent, though, is still too high, and a significant proportion of these pupils are disadvantaged. The school uses a range of strategies to address this. Pupils who are absent are carefully monitored and leaders react quickly to find out reasons for their absence, particularly with vulnerable pupils. An educational welfare officer works closely with pastoral staff. Your leaders showed inspectors evidence that a mentoring scheme with persistently absent pupils was having an impact in individual cases. However, overall figures for persistent absence still remain stubbornly high.
- Finally, we decided to find out how well you are working to further improve results in the sixth form. A level results overall in 2017, show the need for

students to make more progress when compared to national figures. In vocational subjects, student progress is stronger. Although results in some subjects improved significantly in 2017, others remained low. Where teaching was having a strong impact, assessment was being used well to plan next steps with students. High levels of challenge were also evident. Our visits to classrooms showed a somewhat mixed picture. Where teaching was stronger, students presented and organised their notes thoroughly to aid future revision. In other classes progress was inhibited by imprecise explanation and failure to fully check student understanding.

- You have recently appointed a skilled sixth-form teacher to coach other teachers. However, it is too early to assess the impact this will have on the overall quality of teaching.
- Your leaders in the sixth form monitor students regularly and intervene promptly when they identify underachievement. Students are closely supervised while studying independently and use their time purposefully. Sixth-form students commented on the highly individualised support they receive from staff with their personal problems, as well as the extra academic support available if needed. All were very positive about their studies in the sixth form. Nevertheless, although provision in the sixth form is improving, inconsistencies in teaching remain which are still negatively affecting students' outcomes.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- persistent absence particularly, among disadvantaged pupils is reduced
- the school continues to tackle the inconsistencies in post-16 outcomes by improving the quality of teaching and increasing levels of challenge.

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

Yours sincerely

James Whiting
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors visited 30 lessons across nearly all subjects and covering all year groups, with a particular focus on languages and the sixth form. They

interviewed senior leaders and governors. Pupil interviews were focused on disadvantaged pupils and students in the sixth form. Inspectors, observed behaviour around the school. They scrutinised documentation, pupils' work, and the results of Parent View.