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Ms Victoria Simcock
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Simcock

Short inspection of Parkwood E-Act Academy

Following my visit to the school on 6 February 2018 with Her Majesty's Inspector Gina White, 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment in September 2016, you have been unswerving in your determination to improve the life chances of your pupils by raising expectations across the board. Pupils speak very highly of the difference you have made in raising the bar and inspiring them to do as well as they can. Supported by leaders of the multi-academy trust, you have acted swiftly to address weaknesses in leadership and teaching. As a result, pupils are now making much stronger progress in those subjects where outcomes had recently slipped.

Together with leaders of the multi-academy trust, you are searchingly honest about where you took action and what still remains to be done. You were not afraid to challenge staff and raise expectations to establish your non-negotiable requirements of staff. You have built a team of senior and subject leaders who share the same determination as you; that pupils will achieve as highly as they are capable. These leaders support and challenge one another to improve how pupils are doing. As a result, pupils' progress is accelerating.

You have taken action to address the areas for improvement identified at the school's previous inspection. Following a review of the quality of teaching, a more structured, focused programme of training for teachers, together with changes in staffing, has led to more consistently strong teaching. You support and challenge those staff who require further development. During the inspection, we saw teaching assistants working closely with teachers to support specific pupils in making progress. Standards in mathematics have risen and are now in the top 20%

of schools for pupils' progress due to the quality of teaching and leadership in the subject. You are improving the quality of teaching in English and geography and as a result, standards are rising.

Teachers' use of questions to check pupils' knowledge and understanding is variable. Often, teachers use questions effectively to extend and deepen pupils' learning, but this is not yet consistent across all lessons. However, you acknowledge as a priority the need for teaching to focus more clearly on how pupils of different abilities, especially the most able, make gains in their learning.

Pupils are clear that you have changed their attitudes towards behaviour in school, so that now, clearer expected standards, as they said, 'push us to get ready for learning'. A consistently applied behaviour management system, together with stronger teaching, has led to a noteworthy reduction in instances of poor behaviour. This is a view shared by staff. Pupils conduct themselves well in lessons and around the building. A high level of staff supervision and a one-way system has done much to reduce congestion, although some pupils say that there is still some pushing when there is a swell of pupils on corridors.

You have correctly identified improving pupils' attendance as one of your priorities. As a result of some determined actions, there are signs of improvement in the attendance of some groups of pupils. You have worked hard to challenge the attitudes of some parents and carers about the requirement for good attendance. Rather than giving up in reducing the absence of one of your harder-to-reach groups of pupils, you have appointed specialist staff to work closely with them and their families. Despite the efforts of leaders and the challenges facing the school, however, rates of pupil absence are above the national average and this rightly continues to be an urgent priority, particularly for Year 11.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The designated safeguarding lead ensures that all staff, including those who are new to the school, are fully aware of their responsibilities to keep pupils safe. Training ensures that staff are aware of the risks to children and how to identify signs that all is not well. This training is added to regularly through weekly updates. As a result, staff have a very clear understanding of the particular risks facing your pupils beyond the school gates and school leaders and the governing body have made sure that they have received appropriate guidance and support. Recently, you identified a need for pupils to be further supported in their social, emotional and mental health. As a result, you have begun a programme to train a substantial number of your staff in how to help pupils experiencing these challenges.

You support your most vulnerable pupils well. There are effective and strong links with external agencies so that advice is at hand. Staff entrusted with safeguarding matters make sure that they pass on referrals quickly to the right teams, and then follow up rigorously. This ensures that pupils, and their families, receive timely and

effective support when there are concerns or when a crisis occurs.

Pupils told us that they feel safe in school and that there are no parts of the school which they avoid. They say that there is now very little bullying in school. This is as a result of the anti-bullying work you did with your pupils and staff. Your junior leadership group said that pupils are encouraged to speak out if worried, and that when bullying does occur, they go with confidence to speak to a member of staff.

Inspection findings

- Your work to increase the expectations of teachers and pupils is evident in the strong progress that most pupils are making across subject areas. This is notably the case in English, where across different year groups pupils are developing into confident writers. A focus on developing greater fluency in pupils' writing and speaking is leading to strong improvements in these skills. In Year 9 and Year 10, for example, pupils were crafting detailed responses to challenging questions about Shakespeare's use of language in 'Macbeth'. Evidence in books showed that disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making swift progress to write well-structured pieces using accurate punctuation and strong descriptive language.
- In history and geography, we saw further evidence of pupils making good progress. In a Year 10 lesson, for instance, pupils had sifted and then selected the main factors as to why the American economy had grown following the First World War, and could articulate these reasons clearly and with understanding. In geography, the teachers' use of technically precise language, and their insistence on pupils to do the same in their responses, enabled pupils to deepen their understanding and skills.
- When your pupils enter the school in Year 7, they are typically below the national average for attainment. You also have significantly more pupils for whom English is an additional language. To address both of these challenges, you have implemented your thematic literacy curriculum at key stage 3. We saw an impressive level of challenge and support in these lessons. In a Year 7 lesson, for example, pupils were learning about the use of the passive and active voice to improve their grammatical competence. They were also employing high-level comprehension skills, not only to decode some challenging language, but to understand it as well. As a result, these pupils are making strong progress from their starting points.
- Teachers use information about pupils' abilities to set work which is appropriately challenging, and on these occasions it is routine for pupils to push themselves to attempt tougher tasks. As a means of ensuring that pupils of different abilities make consistently strong progress, however, this is not yet evenly spread across the school. You had already identified this in your review of teaching, particularly for the most able pupils.
- During the inspection, evidence gathered shows no differences between the learning of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who are not disadvantaged. Through specific teaching strategies, leaders have ensured that teaching increasingly meets the needs of disadvantaged pupils. You acknowledge that plans for the

use of additional funding were not sharp enough in the past, but there is more focus to current plans. While leaders acknowledge that there is still work to do, the school's own data shows diminishing differences between the progress of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils.

- There is now a much clearer and more consistent approach to managing pupil behaviour. Consequently, instances of poor behaviour have reduced substantially over the last year. This is because leaders have put in place several strategies to support pupils at risk of exclusion. These strategies include the effective use of partnerships with local schools and appropriate alternative providers. You also provide counselling to assist pupils to manage their powerful emotions, and use modified, bespoke timetables when necessary. As a result of these actions, the number of exclusions and days lost to learning has fallen drastically since the 2015/16 academic year. However, you recognise that the number of exclusions remains too high and have measures in place to reduce it further. The need for and rate of permanent exclusions has reduced and is now in line with the national average.
- You have done much to improve pupils' attendance and reduce persistent absence. This has had a positive effect with specific, targeted groups of pupils. For example, those pupils joining Year 7 with chronic poor attendance when in Year 6 have seen an almost total and significant improvement in attendance since starting with you. You have worked tirelessly and innovatively to improve the attendance of another specific group of pupils, again with success. Despite this, though, you are not complacent and have already identified the improvement of attendance, especially in Year 11, as a priority for the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' attendance at school further improves by putting targeted plans in place to improve attendance in Year 11, and methodically measuring the effect of all work so that successful strategies can be identified, improved and repeated.
- teaching more firmly focuses on improving the progress of pupils from different starting points, particularly the most able.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Sheffield. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Steve Shaw
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you and the deputy headteacher, a group of subject leaders, the deputy chief executive officer of E-ACT academy trust, the deputy regional director and regional operations director. I had a telephone conversation with the academy trust's regional director. Inspectors met with groups of pupils from key stages 3 and 4 and also spoke informally with them around the school. Inspectors met with the leaders responsible for safeguarding, a group of teachers and other leaders. We conducted joint visits to lessons with you and the senior leader for teaching and learning, in which we looked at pupils' books and spoke with pupils about what they were learning and their progress. We also visited lessons on our own. We looked in detail at pupils' books, both with senior leaders present and on our own. I took into account results from Ofsted's online questionnaires for staff (49 responses) and Parent View (86 responses), including nine free-text responses. A range of documentation was reviewed, including the school's self-evaluation, plans, safeguarding records, assessment information and other documents available on the school website.