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27 February 2018

Ms Meryl Davies
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Dear Ms Davies

Short inspection of Walthamstow School for Girls

Following my visit to the school on 27 February 2018 with Ian Morris, 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Since the previous inspection you, your leadership team and governing body have worked relentlessly to continue to drive improvements in the standard of education provided in the school. You have worked as a team to consolidate and enhance the school's strengths and address the areas requiring improvement. These include those areas requiring further development arising from the previous inspection. The school's strengths in teaching and learning and its excellent leadership capacity have been recognised in Walthamstow School for Girls recent designation as a Teaching School.

You have established a culture of high aspirations for all, underpinned by effective systems and structures. You are unwavering in your commitment to pupils' academic, emotional and creative development. Pupils make very strong progress and attain results well above national averages in GCSE examinations. Under the government's measure known as 'progress 8', this puts the school in the top 5% of all schools nationally. Pupils' progress in English was particularly strong, being in the top 1% of all schools nationally. Despite this you are not complacent, and are working to ensure that all pupils make the strongest progress across the range of

subjects.

The school is calm and well ordered. The behaviour and conduct of pupils is very good. Pupils interact with each other and staff in a relaxed and convivial manner. The overwhelming majority of staff who responded to the staff survey said the school is well led and managed. The vast majority of parents and carers who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's questionnaire, were very positive about the ethos of the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You, your staff and governors place the safety, personal development and well-being of pupils at the centre of plans for the school's continued improvement. Systems and processes for supporting pupils' welfare are comprehensive and records relating to child protection are maintained to a high standard.

Staff receive training on issues such as the 'Prevent' duty, child sexual exploitation and domestic violence. As a result, staff are well informed and knowledgeable about the potential risks young people face. Staff were very clear as to whom they would report safeguarding concerns. Effective use is made of external agencies to support vulnerable pupils when appropriate.

Time in assemblies and in personal, social, health and economic education sessions is used effectively to teach pupils how to keep safe. Pupils spoken to by inspectors know how to keep themselves safe online and when travelling around London. Pupils know who to turn to if they have a concern and if bullying did happen, staff would deal with it.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, four areas of focus were agreed. The first of these was the progress of low prior attaining pupils in humanities. This was because, in 2017, progress for this group of learners was not as strong in humanities as in other subjects.
- Actions taken by leaders are already having an impact. Leaders have put in place detailed and reliable systems to monitor and track the progress of all pupils. Therefore leaders can easily identify pupils who need additional support to make better progress. Staff are supported through a coherent professional development programme, which includes opportunities to share best practice and learn from each other.
- In the humanities classes visited by inspectors, teaching was characterised by good subject knowledge and activities that were well-chosen to meet pupils' learning needs. Work in pupils' books suggested that low prior attaining pupils are now making progress in line with their peers. Current school assessment data shows that, overall, low prior attaining pupils in humanities are now making strong progress towards their target grades. However, leaders recognise that

more remains to be done to consolidate these actions.

- The second area of focus for the inspection was the progress of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities as identified by the school as needing additional support. This was because, in 2017, this group of pupils made slower progress than others relative to their starting points.
- Clear systems are in place to identify pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities as well as pupils who develop learning needs while at the school. Leaders, including specialists and the wider pastoral team, monitor pupils' progress meticulously and ensure that additional support is provided where a pupil falls behind. Leaders recognise that the needs of some pupils are complex and require individual responses. A wide range of specialist support is used effectively to support the most vulnerable.
- Work in books and lessons shows that, from their starting points, pupils with SEN and/or disabilities are now making stronger progress. For example, in a mathematics lesson, pupils' needs were clearly understood by the teacher; well planned activities gave pupils confidence in their grasp of equations. Even so, as the school acknowledges, the emphasis of staff training has been on overcoming general barriers to learning. A key area for development is for leaders to ensure that teachers have training to further support the specific educational needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities in their classrooms.
- The third area of focus was the consistency of middle leadership. We agreed to look at the impact of your focus on developing the quality of middle leadership as part of your drive to ensure the very best outcomes for pupils.
- Leaders have worked hard to ensure that middle leaders are effective drivers of change within the school, leading their own departmental self-evaluation and development planning. Each year, as a routine part of this improvement process, they complete a self-evaluation activity which combines academic and action research. Middle leaders say they are trusted to make important decisions within their faculties. They spoke enthusiastically with inspectors about the excellent range of professional development opportunities open to them, which they are encouraged to take up.
- Inspectors found that middle leaders are working with a high level of consistency across the school. Middle leaders are confident, competent and relishing their roles. Those spoken to were clear about how to implement strategies for improvement, effectively measure impact and improve outcomes for young people. They were clear about the accountability they had for the progress of the pupils in their subject areas.
- The fourth area of focus was how the curriculum prepares pupils for life after they leave Walthamstow School for Girls. This was because you view the curriculum as a strength of the school.
- Leaders effectively promote a coherent and integrated approach to the curriculum so that all subjects contribute to commonly held aims. The curriculum takes forward the school's 'G.R.E.E.N' vision with the values of 'Growth, Resilience, Energy, Empathy and Newness' in the classroom and beyond. A broad and balanced key stage 3 curriculum enables pupils to have an excellent

grounding in a range of subjects. In modern foreign languages, for example, Year 7 pupils study French, Spanish and have the opportunity to learn Urdu. Key stage 4 leaders have ensured the curriculum is well matched to pupils' capabilities. Leaders think very carefully about what to include in the personal, social, health and economic education programme so that it is relevant and worthwhile. A wide ranging extra-curricular programme sharpens pupils' skills, confidence and self-esteem. For example, pupils in the steel pans group were confident and eager to provide inspectors with an impromptu performance of 'Psycho'.

- Pupils spoken to by inspectors are very proud of the school and its diversity, which is enhanced by the many extra-curricular activities on offer. As one pupil commented 'without the arts, the school would not help pupils in becoming independent young women with creative minds'. The exceptional academic outcomes reflect the breadth of the curriculum and high take up of extra-curricular opportunities.
- Pupils are confident that they can make informed choices when selecting their option subjects at the end of key stage 3 and their place of study after leaving Year 11. As a result, the proportion of pupils who go on to further education, training and employment is higher than the national averages.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching staff are trained in effective strategies to meet the specific learning needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- teaching in humanities is of a consistently high standard to enable low prior attaining pupils to make at least good progress from their starting points.

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

Sarah Parker
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspection began with a discussion of the school's self-evaluation. Together, we agreed the key lines of enquiry that the inspectors would follow during the inspection. Inspectors looked at school documentation, including behaviour and exclusion logs and minutes of governing body meetings. Inspectors visited lessons, looking at work and talking to pupils. Inspectors met with senior and middle leaders, new staff, the designated safeguarding lead and two groups of pupils. The lead inspector spoke with governors, a representative of the local authority and the Safer Schools police officer. In addition, inspectors considered responses to the staff survey, the pupil survey and Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents.