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12 June 2018

Miss Clare Verga
Executive Principal
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Dear Miss Verga

Short inspection of City of London Academy Islington

Following my visit to the school on 15 May 2018 with Yvonne Chisholm, 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 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. 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 specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection.

Since your appointment in September 2012, you and your team have focused consistently on improving outcomes for pupils. You have enabled pupils to make continual progress and maximised their opportunities and achievements. You have accomplished this by rigorously focusing on ensuring high-quality teaching and learning, increasing leaders' expectations of colleagues and pupils, and improving pupils' behaviour for learning. As a result, pupils' progress has significantly increased and your vision to 'transform lives' is routinely being realised.

You have accurately identified the school's strengths and tackled the areas for improvement as identified in the school's previous inspection report. You are now focused on further increasing the progress of boys and the most able pupils. You have clear and high expectations that all curriculum areas demonstrate similarly high levels of progress and that the persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils is reduced.

Governors commend and fully support your work. They bring knowledge and skills which support the strategic planning of the school. For example, the new 'risk register' was established and is used consistently well by governors and leaders. It focuses on 'safeguarding, solvency, strategy and standards' and supports the strategic direction of the school very effectively. Governors actively support the school's involvement in 'widening participation' activities offered by both school sponsors, which provide pupils with opportunities to enrich their curriculum studies, such as additional tutoring for English and mathematics. Governors are knowledgeable about the progress of different groups of pupils, the areas for improvement and the effectiveness of school procedures and processes. This work is well documented in the minutes of governors' meetings.

On the day of the inspection, pupils were polite, friendly and willing to talk with inspectors. Your surveys show that this is typical and is exemplified in the pupil survey, where the majority of pupils state that they 'behave well' and 'are taught to respect each other'. Pupils actively contributed to the calm and purposeful atmosphere during breaktimes and lunchtimes, for example, by playing soothing music on the grand piano in the atrium which permeated the school. They reported that teachers provide them with helpful advice and guidance about keeping themselves safe outside school and when working online. Pupils spoke highly of the personal, social, health and economic education lessons and assemblies which gave them specific skills to deal with risks. Sixth-form students spoke positively about their achievements, the quality of teaching they receive and the support available for their next steps. The majority of parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, said they would recommend the school to other parents.

During our initial meeting, we discussed your website, which did not meet the requirements on the publication of specified information.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, your leaders and governors, have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Safeguarding records are detailed and systems are robust. You have established a culture of safeguarding across the school. All staff are trained to an appropriate level and receive regular safeguarding updates. They are aware of their statutory responsibility to keep pupils safe and have undertaken 'Prevent' duty training. Staff carefully monitor any pupils causing concern and make appropriate and timely referrals.

Weekly meetings focus on pupils who need extra support to improve their attitude to their learning. Resulting actions have led to a decrease in the number of fixed-term and permanent exclusions. Pupils told inspectors that the work of the personalised coaching programme had also significantly contributed to their ability to self-regulate. As a result, these pupils reduced their negative behaviours, including exclusion rates, and improved their relationships with teachers.

Inspection findings

- We first agreed to see how you and your leaders are working to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence, especially for disadvantaged pupils. Both figures are below national levels. However, in 2017 overall attendance declined, with 80% of the sessions missed being by pupils in receipt of free school meals. You have accurately identified the concern and implemented strategies such as employing an educational welfare officer, increasing the frequency of home visits and ultimately imposing fines.
- Heads of house are supporting pupils well through the weekly attendance monitoring system and core group meetings involving key personnel. This ensures that actions to support pupils are specific, personalised and targeted accurately. This also enables form tutors to hold daily conversations with pupils about their attendance, resulting in praise and rewards for improved attendance. These actions have been effective and this year pupils' attendance is improving. However, you are aware of the need to continually focus on this aspect of the school's work.
- Next, we looked at the progress of the most able pupils, especially boys. This was because in 2017 progress scores for these pupils, although above the national average, were generally lower than middle- and lower-ability pupils.
- You and your leaders have established a purposeful and positive environment for learning. This, along with the relentless focus on 'pedagogical practice' has increased consistency, raised expectations and improved the quality of teaching, learning and assessments. Evidence from pupils' work in their books and in lessons shows that pupils make better progress when teachers use leaders' strategies for assessment. However, there is some inconsistency across the school which means that some pupils, such as the most able pupils and boys, are capable of making even better progress.
- We also looked at how leaders have enabled and sustained the improved achievement which has resulted in significantly above-average outcomes for pupils in recent years. We focused on how this improvement was being extended across the curriculum, especially in science and the foundation subjects. This was because in 2017, science results, although above average, were lower when compared to other English Baccalaureate subjects. You have identified which aspects of science provision need to improve further and have collaborated with another school to share best practice and to raise standards.
- School leaders are insightful, quick and sharp to identify and address underperformance. The department reviews are concise, accurate and perceptive. They succinctly identify departmental strengths and actions to enable further improvements in the quality of teaching. Leaders have overseen a range of informative and helpful whole-school and departmental strategies and curriculum projects. These provide teachers with the training and guidance they need to develop their skills and improve their teaching. However, middle leaders are not always clear on the impact of different strategies on pupils' outcomes.
- Finally, we looked at the quality of sixth-form provision because achievement in

2017 was significantly above the national average overall. However, not all of the most able students achieved the top grades. Our visits to classrooms revealed that teachers have excellent subject knowledge and lessons include activities which teach students the skills to reach these higher grades. This agrees with your evaluation of the sixth form, where you have identified 'high levels of challenge and enjoyment'. Your current attainment data indicates a significantly improving picture for students' outcomes, resulting in the majority of students being offered university places.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers consistently apply leaders' expectations for assessment so that all pupils make even better progress in their learning
- middle leaders regularly monitor and evaluate the impact of strategies on pupils' outcomes to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

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

Yours sincerely

Hayley Follett
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, the inspection team visited classrooms and looked at pupils' work with senior leaders across a range of subjects and year groups. We met with you and other school leaders. We also met with the chair and other members of the governing body. We spoke with groups of pupils during breaktimes and lunchtimes and observed their behaviour around the school. Sixteen parents responded to the survey and we analysed their views. We looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, the strategic academy improvement plan, information about pupils' achievement, departmental reviews, destination data, safeguarding records and policies. I undertook a review of the school's website.