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Mr Andrew Roberts  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Roberts

### **Short inspection of Riverside School**

Following my visit to the school on 24 January 2019 with Joanna Jones, 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 your school was judged to be good in June 2015.

### **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 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 section 5 inspection.

Your inclusive approach to sharing your vision and driving change results in pupils' impressive outcomes by the end of Year 11. Your vision is focused on maximising pupils' achievement, and you work effectively alongside your leadership team, trustees, governors, staff, and parents and carers to achieve this.

You and your senior leaders are determined not to give up on any pupil. Your middle leaders and classroom teachers ensure that all pupils achieve well. Your high aspirations for pupils and post-16 students are reflected in the aims in the school and subject improvement plans. At the previous inspection, an area for improvement was for leaders to sharpen their improvement planning and evaluation of the impact of the actions they take. Leaders have addressed this area for improvement by checking that actions have been effective on a regular basis.

Your vision is for teachers to use teaching techniques based on tried and tested educational research that are proven to support pupils to learn well. Pupils complete work that is both challenging and engaging, so their progress is strong over time. Teachers check pupils' understanding before introducing new

information, especially when teaching classes in Years 7 to 11. You have successfully addressed these aspects of teaching, which were identified as areas to improve at the last inspection.

You identify middle leaders who demonstrate strong leadership capability and provide opportunities for them to move into senior leadership roles. This means that you can sustain the capacity of senior leaders to improve the school. This is enabling you to implement whole-school initiatives, especially to improve teaching and pupils' learning.

Very strong leadership is demonstrated in three ways. First, the school's curriculum model offers a variety of academic and vocational learning programmes. These are matched to pupils' prior attainment and their specific learning needs. Second, there is a wide range of extra-curricular activities, and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and a civics curriculum. Third, an effective continuing professional development and learning (CPDL) programme incorporates time for teachers to plan and share their ideas about ways to improve their teaching. This is enhancing teachers' effectiveness and supporting the school's improvement priorities and pupils' learning.

Pupils' academic performance is seen in the higher than national results attained by Year 11 pupils in both 2017 and 2018 in public examinations. Furthermore, the progress of all pupils and different pupil groups, including those who are disadvantaged, is significantly high between Years 7 to 11. This is compared with their peers nationally with similar starting points. This means that pupils' progress by the end of Year 11 is within the highest 10% of schools nationally.

Pupils say that they enjoy school. A testament of their enjoyment is that their overall attendance figures are very high compared with the national average for all pupils. Additionally, their overall persistent absence figures are very low. These positive attendance trends are mirrored in the sixth form and by nearly all of the different pupil groups in the school. The exception is pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) without an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Attendance of this pupil group is low compared with the national figures for all pupils. You and your team are aware of this and are acting to improve their attendance.

The sixth form opened in September 2017. Students take academic A-level courses in your school and study a range of vocational subjects in other local schools. This means that the first cohort of Year 13 students will sit their post-16 public examinations in June 2019. Evidence seen during the inspection shows that the quality of teaching and students' learning post-16 is typically strong over time.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and meet current requirements. Leaders, trustees and governors promote a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. As a

result, pupils and sixth-form students say that they feel safe. They also know with whom to speak if they have any concerns. Leaders and trustees have trained staff and governors in the school's latest safeguarding procedures. They receive regular updates, so that any required improvements can be implemented. Parents and staff agree that children are safe at your school.

The systems in place to check the suitability of all staff to work with children are rigorous and the single central record includes adults who visit the site from other schools. Effective systems are in place to check that pupils who attend alternative provision and post-16 students taught in other local schools are safe. Concerns about pupils are carefully monitored and comprehensive written child protection records provide evidence of very quick follow-up action when issues are identified. Senior leaders have effective partnerships with external agencies to ensure that pupils receive early help if this is required.

### **Inspection findings**

- We agreed to focus on three key lines of enquiry: first, to check leaders' impact on delivering and sustaining pupils' strong progress from their starting points in Years 7 to 11 and the sixth form, and furthermore, whether leaders are routinely checking and evaluating the impact of their actions to drive whole-school priorities, especially in teaching and pupils' learning. Second, we agreed to confirm the effectiveness of the action taken by leaders to maintain pupils' high attendance, including students in Years 12 and 13. We agreed to investigate the absence of those pupils with SEND who do not have an EHC plan. Third, we agreed to evaluate the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding arrangements and to explore how leaders support pupils' emotional well-being.
- Year 11 pupils made very strong progress between Years 7 and 11 in both 2017 and 2018. This progress continues for current pupils in Years 7 to 11. Inspectors saw evidence of pupils learning very well over time. Pupils can explain their understanding of difficult ideas and how their knowledge is developing over time.
- Work in pupils' books shows very strong learning over time. This is consistent for pupils with different prior attainment. Furthermore, the school's latest internal assessment of the current pupils in Years 7 to 11 shows that pupils' progress remains strong. Indeed, pupils' performance information matches their learning over time.
- You and your senior team are aware of the need to strengthen post-16 teaching further, so that students' outcomes are stronger. Changes are taking place to do this, for example by commissioning an external review of sixth-form teaching in December 2018, and using the recommendations as a focus for teachers' CPDL. This is to move teachers' classroom practice closer to the style used in the main school, which results in extremely strong outcomes.
- Evidence seen during this inspection shows the positive impact of the swift action you are putting in place to improve post-16 teaching and learning. For example, A-level students are able to explain complex theories in psychology and how these are linked to everyday situations. This is evidence of the impact of your work to drive improvement in students' outcomes. This is so that these outcomes

match the extremely strong progress pupils make between Years 7 and 11.

- The overall attendance figures for pupils are high and the persistent absence figures are low compared with national figures for all pupils. However, further action is required to improve the attendance of pupils with one pupil group. This is those pupils with SEND in Years 7 to 11 who do not have an EHC plan. Numerous initiatives are in place to raise these pupils' attendance. Nonetheless, the overall attendance figures for this specific group of pupils remain low compared with those for other groups in the school. Attendance figures for other groups are either broadly in line with the latest figures for all pupils nationally, or higher. In both March 2018 and July 2018, the proportion of pupils with SEND without an EHC plan in Years 7 to 11, who are persistently absent from school, was very high, compared with the persistent absence figures for all pupils nationally.
- Pupils' emotional well-being is supported by a professional counsellor. Teachers also train in mindfulness, a reflective practice that helps pupils to reduce their stress and improve emotional resilience. This support also helps pupils to feel safe and happy at school so they learn well.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the overall attendance and persistent absence figures for pupils with SEND, who do not have an EHC plan, improve to match or exceed the national average for all pupils
- the quality of teaching in the sixth form is strengthened further, so that post-16 students make stronger progress over time by the end of Year 13, in all their subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Pamela Fearnley  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

We met with you and your deputy headteachers, and held meetings with various senior and middle leaders. I interviewed a representative from the multi-academy trust and met with pupils and students to gain their views of the school. Short visits were made to a range of classes in a variety of subjects to observe learning and scrutinise pupils' work, some jointly with you and members of the senior leadership team. We also spoke to pupils and students in lessons about their learning. A range of documentary evidence, including the school's self-evaluation, school and sixth-form improvement plans, and safeguarding records, was scrutinised. Performance information showing the progress of pupils in Years 7 to 11 and of students in Year 13 towards their targets was evaluated, as was the school's analysis of attendance.

We considered the views of pupils in Years 7 to 11 based on the school's recent survey, and staff and parents' responses to Ofsted's online staff survey and Parent View questionnaire respectively. The written comments on Ofsted's online parent survey were considered. There were no responses to Ofsted's online survey for pupils.