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Mr John Halliwell  
Executive Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Halliwell

### **Short inspection of Applegarth Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 26 March 2019, 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 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 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 be a section 5 inspection.

Since the last inspection, leaders have tackled identified areas for improvement successfully. These were to increase the proportion of pupils at key stage 1 who reach above average standards and to broaden and deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding beyond English and mathematics.

Through carefully considered actions, leaders have tackled these aspects successfully. More pupils than previously are working at greater depth standards in key stage 1. The actions you have taken are also having an impact on the outcomes for pupils in key stage 2. In the past three years, pupils, including disadvantaged pupils in key stage 2, made progress which has been significantly above the national average. Most notably, the proportions of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, achieving standards above those expected are higher than the national averages in 2018.

Your leadership has been highly effective and you are supported by a very capable team of senior leaders, and expert teaching and support staff. You have secured stability in the school's staffing. Teachers appreciate the high-quality professional development they

receive. They are complimentary of the adaptations you have made to reduce teachers' workload.

Pupils enjoy school and talk with great enthusiasm about their learning. They have extremely positive attitudes to their work, and this contributes to the strong progress that they make. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They get on extremely well with one another and the adults who teach them. Pupils support their peers in making positive behaviour choices. Around the school, they encourage each other to be sensible and calm, and they talk fondly about how they collaborate to help their learning. Pupils appreciate their teachers and feel that their teachers ensure that they receive a high-quality education. Typical of pupils' comments was: 'Whatever it is that we need, our teachers find ways to support us.'

Leaders, including governors and trustees, have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They have high expectations and are not complacent about what needs improving. They plan carefully for the future development of the school. You and your senior colleagues work very well as a team. Leaders and governors hold all staff to account. The culture at Applegarth Academy is aspirational and successfully motivates staff and pupils to strive for success.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders, governors, and trustees work effectively together to ensure that the school has robust safeguarding arrangements, that systems are in place and that staff understand them well. Leaders ensure a culture of vigilance at the school, and staff maintain detailed records carefully. All staff have appropriate and up-to-date training so that they can spot and deal with any problems quickly. Leaders are proactive, liaising with external agencies, and challenging them where necessary, to ensure that timely and appropriate support is sourced for vulnerable pupils.

Pupils are confident that they are safe and know who to turn to if they have any concerns. They are confident they can go to a 'trusted adult' in school to express their worries. The vast majority of pupils who spoke with inspectors were adamant that bullying at the school was rare and that, if it were to happen, staff would deal with it swiftly and effectively. Pupils learn about keeping themselves safe at home, at school or online through a multitude of opportunities across the curriculum. Pupils can talk about the lessons they received on cyber bullying, e-safety and stranger danger, among other topics.

### **Inspection findings**

- During our initial discussion, we agreed to look at pupils' progress in reading as a key line of enquiry. This was because, in the past three years, progress in reading has been significantly above average. In 2018, the proportion of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, who achieve the higher standard was much higher than the national average for all pupils. We wanted to know what accounts for such strong outcomes in reading.
- The teaching of reading is a strength of the school. From the early years to key stage 1, pupils benefit from a phonics programme delivered skilfully by highly-trained staff. This ensures that pupils get off to a great start in their early reading, enabling a greater

proportion of pupils to pass the Year 1 phonics screening check than the national average. This is complemented by the many opportunities staff provide for pupils to engage in a wide variety of reading materials. Pupils who read to me displayed a genuine delight when reading.

- As pupils move up the school, teachers ensure that pupils develop the skills they need to gain a deep understanding of the texts they are reading. Consequently, pupils are able to use and apply the more sophisticated skills of inference and deduction when engaging in texts. Pupils practise and consolidate these skills regularly. As a result, pupils make strong progress in their reading over time.
- We also looked at the achievement of most-able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, in key stage 1. This was because, in 2018, a smaller proportion of pupils in these groups achieved greater depth in key stage 1 than the national average.
- Leaders' support for teachers in key stage 1 has helped them acquire a detailed understanding of the standards required for each of the subjects they teach. Teachers have also received effective guidance on how to support the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, to enable these pupils to achieve greater depth.
- In mathematics, for example, teachers create many opportunities to deepen pupils' understanding of concepts. They ensure that most-able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, receive appropriate challenge. As a result, these group of pupils show highly developed mathematical reasoning. Their work shows that they are meeting greater depth standards in this subject.
- Similarly, teachers ensure that the most able pupils apply their skills when writing across the curriculum. Teachers demand precision in pupils' spelling, grammar and punctuation. Pupils receive effective guidance from adults on how to improve their work. This has enabled a higher proportion of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, to meet greater depth standards in key stage 1.
- Finally, we considered the breadth of the curriculum and the extent to which it develops pupils' knowledge and skills. We wanted to see if pupils achieve in the wider curriculum as well as they do in the core subjects of reading, writing and mathematics. Senior leaders, working alongside subject leaders, have undertaken a thorough review of the school's curriculum. Leaders have designed and implemented a curriculum which ensures that pupils make strong progress across a full range of subjects, for example history, science and art.
- Pupils make strong progress in their historical understanding, as they are skilled at studying objects and artefacts to establish how people lived in the past. Their understanding of chronology is strong as they are able to place significant events in history in timelines.
- Similarly, pupils achieve well in science. Pupils talk about the opportunities they have to learn in biology, from learning about plants in Year 1 to studying the classification of animals in Year 3. Pupils are able to make links between subjects and are able to recall significant knowledge they have learned from their topics.
- In art, teachers provide pupils with opportunities to develop artistic skills. Pupils' experiences in this subject range from a foundation of understanding primary and secondary colours to working with various media and textures. However, pupils' understanding of cultural and artistic contexts is limited and could be further developed.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- in art, design and technology, pupils develop greater understanding of historical and cultural context.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of directors and the chief executive officer of STEP Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Croydon. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Edison David  
**Ofsted Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, I discussed the work of the school with you and with members of the senior leadership team. I spoke to pupils to discuss their experiences in lessons, the extent to which they feel safe, and their views on learning and behaviour. I held discussions with a representative of the local authority, and the members of the academy trust's executive board. I had a telephone discussion with the chair of the strategic governing body. I considered the 66 responses to Ofsted's parent survey and the 16 responses to the staff survey. I also considered documentation provided by the school and information posted on the school's website. I looked at the single central record of staff suitability checks, and the documentation relating to the safeguarding of children. Together with school leaders, I visited classes to observe learning and looked at samples of pupils' work across all subjects. I listened to pupils read from across the ability range.