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Susan Cook
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Cook

Short inspection of West Thurrock Academy

Following my visit to the academy on 12 January 2016, with John Lucas HMI, 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 predecessor school was judged to be good in December 2010.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the academy since the last inspection. The academy has grown considerably in size and is rightly very popular in the local area. You are passionate about making the academy the best it can be and have a clear focus on continual improvement. This is reflected in the very strong outcomes for pupils overall. In order to become outstanding, the academy now needs to raise the attainment of White British pupils still further, and ensure that a greater proportion make rapid progress, so that the progress of all groups of pupils is more consistent.

Although the academy moved into the current building more than five years ago, it still has the fresh look and feel of a new building because it is so well-cared-for. The bright and welcoming entrance foyer, followed by the well-utilised and attractive open-plan areas, create an immediate impression that you are walking into a good school.

Pupils enjoy coming to the academy and show great pride in it. One pupil described West Thurrock Academy as 'the best school ever' and another commented that they were 'speechless about how good the school is'. Pupils appreciate the wide range of opportunities that the academy offers them, such as the residential visit to Barcelona in Year 6. In a meeting with a representative group from Key Stage 2,

pupils were unable to think of anything that they did not like about the school or would want to change.

The academy serves a diverse population, both in terms of ethnicity and of social and cultural background. These differences are welcomed and celebrated. The academy forms a harmonious, cosmopolitan community where everyone feels valued and at home. As a result, pupils show good attitudes to their learning, work hard and behave well. They are prepared well for life in modern British society.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and the academy's governors have ensured that safeguarding is effective and statutory requirements are met. The school's single central record meets requirements and is checked regularly by the governor with responsibility for safeguarding. Arrangements for the safer recruitment of new staff are robust.

You have put sensible procedures in place to keep pupils safe. For example, no-one is allowed to be unaccompanied in the academy unless thorough safeguarding checks have been completed. Visitors who have been checked are issued with a green lanyard and unchecked visitors with a red lanyard. This means that any member of staff is immediately able to identify and challenge an unaccompanied, unchecked visitor should they ever need to.

Pupils feel safe in the academy. They feel free from bullying and are very confident that staff deal effectively with playground issues when they arise. Pupils have been taught about a range of ways to keep themselves safe, including e-safety. The pupils that met with me described confidently what they would do if they were ever worried about something while using the internet and they knew how and when they should seek help.

Inspection findings

- You have created a learning culture in which every pupil is seen as a valuable individual with their own needs and interests. Relationships between staff and pupils are particularly strong and this creates a very positive atmosphere in classrooms and throughout the school. One parent commented that 'there's a real bond between the teachers and the children' and this was evident throughout the inspection.
- This child-centred approach is reflected in the way the school council is organised. At West Thurrock Academy, every pupil is a member of the school council and meetings are held regularly throughout the school. Pupils value this system and were keen to say how much they feel that they are listened to. For example, pupils expressed concern, via the school council meetings, that part of the perimeter fencing was too low and that it made them feel unsafe. In response, you arranged for this piece of fencing to be replaced and pupils now say that there is nowhere in the academy that they do not feel safe.

- On the whole, pupils achieve very well and make good progress at West Thurrock Academy. At the end of Key Stage 1, in general pupils reach levels just above the national average. In 2015, results in the Key Stage 2 national tests were well above the national average. Similarly, the progress pupils made between the end of Year 2 and the end of Year 6 was well above the national average in 2015.
- You and the academy's leaders allocate spending of the pupil premium grant thoughtfully and carefully. It is used in a wide variety of ways in response to individual pupils' needs including, for example, counselling sessions and booster groups for literacy and numeracy. You and the academy's leaders monitor the impact of the way the money is spent carefully. However, the analysis of the impact on pupils' attainment is somewhat generous because comparisons have been made with other disadvantaged pupils nationally rather than with non-disadvantaged pupils. Although the pupil premium grant is generally spent well, a disproportionate amount was spent on a very small number of pupils last year, primarily in response to their special educational needs. In order to maximise the impact of this additional funding, it is important that special educational needs are met through the appropriate budget rather than through the pupil premium grant.
- The quality of teaching is generally good throughout the school and monitoring by the academy's leaders shows that some is outstanding. You and the academy's leaders make continual improvement to the quality of teaching one of your top priorities. You arrange for appropriate support to be provided when it is needed and you do not shy away from having difficult conversations or taking firm action when performance is not good enough.
- The academy's governors are committed to the school and highly supportive of it. They work closely with you and the academy's leaders and support you well. Governors clearly know the academy well and minutes of governing body meetings indicate that they regularly ask questions about things they are told and the information they are given. However, governors sometimes accept the answers they are given too readily and need to challenge more deeply in order to better hold the academy's leaders to account.
- Results in the phonics screening check fell in 2015 and were below the national average (the phonics screening check is a statutory assessment of pupils' knowledge of the relationships between letters and sounds, taken towards the end of Year 1). You are aware of the reasons for this and have put support in place to ensure that these pupils reach the expected level when they are re-assessed at the end of Year 2. The school has set itself a target just above the national figure and you have put measures in place to ensure that this target is reached.
- White British pupils do not achieve as well as other pupils in the school. In 2015, at the end of Key Stage 2, results for White British pupils were below the national average in reading, writing and in spelling and grammar. Progress in writing for this group of pupils was well below the national average in 2015.

Many pupils in this group are also disadvantaged, reflecting the lower outcomes for pupils eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils eligible for free school meals and those in the care of the local authority).

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- outcomes for White British pupils improve, particularly at the higher levels, so that they attain as highly and make the same good progress as their peers
- governors develop further their ability to hold the academy's leaders to account by questioning more deeply the information they are given
- spending of the pupil premium grant is fine-tuned to provide maximum benefit to all disadvantaged pupils.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Thurrock Council, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, other senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors. The lead inspector met with a group of pupils from Key Stage 2 and spoke with other pupils throughout the day. An inspector spoke with parents in the playground and responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, were taken into account. The inspector observed teaching and learning in lessons jointly with the headteacher, looked at pupils' books, and scrutinised a range of school documents.