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Ms Katie Scarnell
Principal
Greensward Academy
Greensward Lane
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Dear Ms Scarnell

Short inspection of Greensward Academy

Following my visit to the school on 20 February 2018 with Vivien Corrie-Wing and Joanna Jones, Ofsted Inspectors, 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 June 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment 18 months ago, the school has benefited from your collaborative and open style of leadership. You clearly want the best for your pupils. All leaders work well with you to identify the strengths of the school and areas which need to develop further. The teaching and outcomes at key stage 5 are very strong. The school's continued improvement is supported well by the governing body and the trust.

Pivotal to your school's work is the determination that all pupils, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, succeed academically. Leaders are instrumental in embedding the idea of 'strength in challenge' and 'the healthy struggle'. Pupils speak enthusiastically about how challenge in their work helps them to make progress and they enjoy their lessons as a result.

You are determined to lead the school away from a culture of help outside the classroom at key stage 4, after strategies have not worked, to a culture of effective teaching across all subjects from the start of Year 7. This has led to leaders radically changing practice in some areas, for example in the way pupils receive support for special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Leaders have invested time and researched what makes teaching effective in the classroom. They are committed to ensuring that all pupils receive quality teaching. One parent said: 'Every day my child comes home and recounts her day with enthusiasm; she is going from strength to strength academically, because she feels able and encouraged to participate in class.'

You and your leadership team have developed effective methods to determine pupils' strengths and weaknesses. Leaders also ensure that the quality of teaching meets your high expectations. These strategies have underpinned improvements in standards, notably in English and mathematics, but can also be seen in creative arts subjects. Leaders recognise that there is room for improvement in the outcomes in some subjects like science, especially for disadvantaged pupils, and you have explicitly addressed this in your planning and delivery from the start of this academic year. We discussed the concern of some parents and carers about communications from the school. For example, comments were noted in the Ofsted online questionnaire that the reports parents receive about pupils' progress are overly complicated and the graphs difficult to interpret.

During the inspection, the pupils behaved respectfully and conducted themselves well. Pupils are eager and willing to learn; this behaviour helps them make good progress in their lessons. Leaders were able to show a marked decrease in the number of incidents of poor behaviour and fixed-term exclusions since your appointment. Pupils, staff and parents are mainly complimentary about the standards of behaviour within the school. One parent said: 'We could not have asked for a better start to secondary school life.' Leaders are now rightly assessing the level of sanction given to pupils for smaller infringements of the school rules, to ensure that these are proportionate.

Since the last inspection, attendance has improved. Pastoral leaders ensure that pupils understand the importance of good attendance. Although a marked increase has occurred in the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, leaders are not complacent and recognise that this still needs to improve further, so that these pupils attend as regularly as others.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that there is a strong safeguarding culture within the school; pupils, parents and staff all understand and support the culture. Staff are regularly trained on how they should act if they have any concerns and the system for referring concerns is used effectively.

Vulnerable pupils are closely monitored and timely referrals are made to external agencies when needed. Leaders are tenacious in ensuring that pupils receive the external support they may need; this is a strength that is recognised by both pupils and parents.

Pupils speak confidently about how they are safe at school and are taught to keep themselves safe in other situations, including online. They learn about this in tutor time, personal, social, health and economic education and in assemblies. Pupils understand the dangers of radicalisation and other social dangers. Inspectors saw pupils being taught how to develop political views in a balanced and appropriate way that supports life in Britain.

Pupils and staff say that bullying is not a concern at school and if it does occur, staff deal with it swiftly. However, a very small number of parents raised bullying issues from the past.

Inspection findings

- At our first meeting, we agreed four key lines of enquiry to ascertain whether the school remained good. You presented a thorough evaluation of the school's performance and detailed planning to secure continued improvement. The first line of enquiry was to check how leaders ensure that disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as they can, in key stages 3 and 4.
- Leaders have conducted research in school, looking at reasons for the gap between the outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and others. You found that disadvantaged pupils perform better when given 'high challenge but also high support'. Inspectors saw lessons where disadvantaged pupils were thriving alongside other students and teachers now have a keen awareness of the needs of these pupils and how to meet them. Teachers now have high expectations of all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged. Pupils recognise this, and they rise to meet these expectations.
- Leaders have implemented an effective system of tracking the progress of disadvantaged pupils which leads to a range of interventions such as additional tuition for English and science lessons. Study skills are explicitly taught to all pupils; however, this strategy is also effective in moving the progress of disadvantaged pupils forward. Where teachers make bespoke materials and resources available disadvantaged pupils benefit greatly and are further able to make progress.
- You have appointed coordinators within the leadership to ensure that the implementation of initiatives and accountability for the progress of disadvantaged pupils are explicitly reported. Raising the profile of this group of pupils and ensuring that all staff implement the same systems robustly have been central in ensuring their current positive progress.
- The second line of enquiry focused upon how leaders ensure that the teaching, learning and assessment within the science department meet the needs of all pupils. Leaders recognise that the quality of teaching in science fell below your own expectations. The difficulties in this regard were commented on by pupils and parents in the Ofsted online surveys. You have taken action this year to ensure stable staffing and improve the quality of teaching.
- This action is now beginning to produce better progress for your pupils; inspectors saw pupils flourishing in their science lessons. The expectation and challenge set by teachers were very high, for example pupils in Year 8 tackling work normally given in Year 10. The department is now well led, with clear lines of accountability for performance of each class and specialist teachers effectively deployed to their respective areas of expertise. However, you are not complacent and recognise that the rate of this positive change needs to increase. Therefore, you are ensuring that the leadership of science is well supported to implement the necessary changes.

- My third line of enquiry focused on how leaders ensure that teaching, learning and assessment at key stage 3 enable pupils to progress as well as they can. This concern was raised in the previous inspection report. Inspectors found that leaders now have an in-depth knowledge of the quality of teaching and learning and are able to evaluate which strategies are effective in the classroom.
- Whole-school strategies, such as 'interleaving', where teachers revisit previous work when teaching new content, and the focus on increased challenge have helped to underpin a turnaround in the progress of pupils in key stage 3. Leaders have developed expertise in monitoring and reviewing the teaching across all subjects. This allows them to plan training for staff that improves their teaching.
- You have ensured that leaders of departments regularly review their systems for tracking how well pupils are learning. This has led to a curriculum that is well monitored and supports pupils' progress. You have made a conscious decision to not introduce multiple initiatives simultaneously, but you want the whole school to focus on doing two or three things across the curriculum very well. This means that all leaders are clear on what is expected from them and pupils receive a well-thought-out educational experience.
- The final line of enquiry was to investigate how well leaders ensure that pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make as much progress as possible. Leaders had already identified that the model of support needed to change. A major overhaul was recently implemented, with a decrease in the focus of 'catch-up' and an emphasis in the 'effective early intervention' at key stage 3. This means that aspects of learning which this group of pupils find difficult are addressed early. Leaders have implemented a focus on literacy for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. The priority for the school is to help these pupils improve their reading and writing skills.
- The senior leader for this area has led the way in ensuring that the opinions of parents and pupils have shaped the changes. He held interviews with every parent of this group, and afterward explained the reasons behind the new ways of working. Parents were complimentary of this approach on the Ofsted online survey. School data now shows that this group of pupils are achieving in line with other pupils in school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to support and develop the middle leaders of the school so that their work continues to promote pupils' progress and achievement
- they continue with strategies that promote the progress of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.

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 trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Diana Osagie
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, the inspectors carried out the following activities. They: held meetings with you, the senior leadership team, the middle leadership team and the chair of the governing body; met with groups of pupils from key stage 3 and 4; visited lessons with the principal and members of the senior leadership team; considered responses from the Ofsted online survey for pupils, parents and staff; reviewed a range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans and information about pupils' outcomes, progress and attendance; reviewed safeguarding documentation and procedures; scrutinised the school's single central record of checks on the suitability of staff to work at the school; and carried out website checks to confirm that it meets publication requirements.