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Mr Rob James
Headteacher
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Dear Mr James

Short inspection of The Ramsey Academy, Halstead

Following my visit to the school on 8 January 2019 with Al Mistrano 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 the 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 previous inspection.

The previous inspection report indicated that you should improve teaching in order to improve pupils' outcomes further, particularly in mathematics. The progress pupils make over time has improved in several subjects, and notably in humanities and mathematics. Provisional 2018 examination results indicate that this cohort of pupils made very strong progress in mathematics and humanities between the ends of key stage 2 and key stage 4.

You and other leaders have a clear understanding of what is working well and what could still be better. Prior to the inspection, for example, you recognised that while your work to increase the level of challenge across the school has led to improvements, there is still more to do. You know where teaching is strongest and have put support in place to enhance it where it is weaker. Your accurate evaluation allows you and other leaders to focus your work effectively to continue to develop the school.

Together, governors and the trust provide effective oversight of your work. They too have an accurate understanding of how well the school is working and are ambitious for it to continue to improve. They hold you and other leaders to account for the achievement of school improvement plans and check to make sure that the actions you take are effective.

Parents appreciate the quality of education the school provides. Most of those who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, were pleased with all aspects of provision. The written comments we received through the free-text option were highly positive about a range of areas, including the support pupils receive, the effectiveness with which the school communicates with them and the strength of school leadership.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders of safeguarding maintain an accurate record of recruitment checks on adults who work in the school. They recognise the risks that pupils may face and work with others to reduce these. For example, they recently arranged for speakers to help parents and pupils understand the dangers of drugs. Leaders work with other agencies when appropriate and are persistent in seeking effective help to keep pupils safe.

Pupils we spoke with told us that bullying is not a concern. They said that it is not common and that when it does happen, it is dealt with well. This is reflected in the views of most pupils who responded to Ofsted's survey of their views.

Inspection findings

- Our first line of enquiry related to whether teachers consistently provide sufficient challenge to pupils. While provisional 2018 examination results show pupils have made strong progress in mathematics, science and humanities, they show progress to be broadly average in some other subjects, including English and languages.
- Some teaching is particularly effective, with high levels of challenge and work matched well to build on what pupils already know and can do. However, there are some classes where teachers' expectations are lower and work is not tailored as well as it could be to pupils' prior achievements. You and other leaders have addressed this in some subject areas and are already working through plans to ensure that the level of challenge is consistently high across the school.
- We also wanted to find out how well leaders and teachers of subjects other than English, mathematics and the English Baccalaureate subjects understand and meet the needs of different groups of pupils. The key 'Progress 8' performance measure suggests that, over time, disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) achieve less well than they should in these 'open element' subject areas.
- You and other leaders have a good understanding of the needs of these pupils. In your regular reviews of the progress pupils make, you identify if these pupils fall behind. You intervene quickly, provide support and devise strategies to help them catch up. You and other leaders disseminate effective strategies to help pupils with SEND to overcome the barriers to learning their individual needs might create. There is still work to do to ensure that all teachers use these strategies consistently well.

- In addition, you explained to us that you had identified a need for some pupils to receive extra support in some aspects of their education, including essential careers advice and guidance. To make time for this, some pupils need to be entered for fewer qualifications than others. This means that these pupils do not take the full range of 'open element' subjects and is why their overall achievement is low in this group of subjects.
- The final aspect of provision we wanted to find out more about was whether leaders ensure that the behavioural needs of pupils are well supported. In the past, the rate of fixed-term exclusions has been above the national average, especially for pupils with SEND.
- You have introduced a 'behaviour and learning support hub' which allows pupils to think about their conduct, be given support and guidance, and to make progress in their education. As a result of its effective work, you have successfully reduced the proportion of pupils excluded from school, including those with SEND.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers provide consistently high levels of challenge in the work they set for pupils
- teachers apply leaders' strategies to support disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND consistently well.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy 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

Andrew Hemmings
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors spoke with you, other leaders, the chair and other members of the governing body and the chair of the multi-academy trust. We visited parts of 14 lessons and reviewed pupils' work in their books. Inspectors looked at information about pupils' progress and reviewed a range of documentation relating to the school's self-evaluation, development planning and safeguarding arrangements. We reviewed minutes of governing body meetings and the school's information about exclusions.

Inspectors considered the 81 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent

View, and the 62 responses from parents to the free-text option. We also considered the 38 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the 68 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey. Inspectors spoke with a range of pupils during their lunchtime and during a formal meeting to hear their views.