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Mr Andrew Seager
Headteacher
Stratford School Academy
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Dear Mr Seager

Short inspection of Stratford School Academy

Following my visit to the school on 23 May 2017 with Gerard Strong, 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 the school was judged to be good in March 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. In most subjects, pupils do well and continue to make good progress. Attainment overall is slightly above the national average. You have shaped an inclusive and welcoming school environment where pupils are safe and feel safe.

The school is run as two small schools split across two sites. You unify the separate sites successfully through your vision for 'A school where pupils are encouraged and empowered to become the authors of their own life stories and not the subjects of them.' Staff understand this vision and they are committed to the school community. You have developed systems and structures to ensure that both sites are led and managed well, and that communication between staff is effective. For example, when you are physically present at one site, your deputy headteacher is present at the other.

Staff are supported in their own professional development and training is taken very seriously; one hour is devoted to staff training every Wednesday morning. As a result, teachers are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to plan effectively. Teachers typically deliver lessons that engage and motivate pupils to learn.

Since the school was last inspected, leaders have worked effectively to ensure that lessons are well planned and meet the needs of all pupils. You have recently appointed a leader with responsibility for special educational needs in order to improve the provision for these pupils and accelerate their rates of progress.

Governors care passionately about the school and many have a long-standing relationship with the school. Governors understand their responsibility to act as critical friends while supporting leaders' efforts to secure improvements. However, governors do not always have access to precise information on pupils' performance. Consequently, they are not always able to question leaders incisively and hold them to account as fully as they could.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Leaders and managers ensure that safeguarding is effective by providing frequent and appropriate training for staff and governors in all aspects of safeguarding. The school's single central record is updated regularly and includes all relevant pre-employment checks. Safeguarding case files are well organised and comprehensive, indicating that the school responds to any concerns in a timely manner.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and know whom to speak to should they have any concerns about their own safety or the safety of others. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe in person and online through a citizenship programme of study, and through designated daily reflection time focusing on their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Staff and pupils say that bullying is dealt with effectively. While attendance and behaviour records are kept well, leaders do not always analyse these in sufficient detail to act and intervene quickly. As a result, leaders have been unable to measure precisely the impact of any additional support that pupils receive to improve their attendance and behaviour. Fixed-term exclusions are above the national average for all pupils, with a disproportionately high number for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those eligible for free school meals. Leaders are aware of this and are seeking ways to reduce the number and frequency of fixed-term exclusions for all pupils.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry for the inspection focused on progress for girls. This is because in the past, girls have made less strong progress compared with that of boys. Leaders acknowledge that pupils' good overall achievement was mainly due to the stronger progress made by boys, who make up almost three quarters of the school roll.
- Senior leaders know the school well and have implemented strategies to improve rates of progress for girls. In October 2016, you appointed a member of staff to focus on improving outcomes for girls. A comprehensive and effective intervention strategy has been introduced with the aim of ensuring that girls achieve the standards of which they are capable. Staff have received training to help them plan teaching which is more closely matched to the needs of girls. All departments are now required to incorporate strategies to improve outcomes for girls in their planning and teaching, such as deliberately directing effective questions at girls. High-profile female role models have been invited into school to raise aspirations and increase girls' confidence.

- Leaders' efforts to raise girls' achievement are having a positive impact. School assessment information and work in pupils' books indicate that there are no obvious differences between the current progress made by girls and boys. Nevertheless, leaders are aware that girls' outcomes need careful checking to ensure that recent improvements are sustained.
- GCSE results in 2016 showed that most pupils made good progress in all subjects, with the exception of modern foreign languages. For this reason, we agreed to consider this as a second line of enquiry.
- You are clear that you want all pupils to have equal access to rich cultural experiences, irrespective of their background or starting point. However, in the past there has been some uncertainty as to whether pupils' appreciation of modern foreign languages is more important than academic outcomes. Leaders are now equally focused on outcomes as well as the experiences that learning a modern foreign language can offer.
- The modern foreign languages department has undergone significant change recently. A new head of department was appointed in January 2016. In September 2016, leaders took the decision to increase curriculum time for modern foreign languages at key stages 3 and 4, giving the subject the same amount of lesson time as other GCSE subjects. Prior to September 2016, pupils studied two languages at key stage 3. Pupils now choose either French or Spanish and continue this language at GCSE. This is helping pupils to deepen their knowledge and understanding of their preferred language. Subject-specialist teachers now use either French or Spanish as their main language of communication to teach modern foreign languages, with a renewed emphasis on securing pupils' key skills and knowledge.
- Despite recent changes, pupils commented that modern languages do not inspire them in their learning in the way that other subjects do. You recognise that the changes you have implemented are likely to have a greater impact on pupils currently in key stage 3, and there is a need for more rapid targeted intervention in key stage 4.
- In 2016, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieved less favourable outcomes than their peers, and many made lower progress when compared with pupils with similar starting points. We agreed to consider this as our third line of enquiry.
- You have now put in place a strategy to improve outcomes. Staff receive regular training on meeting pupils' individual needs effectively. This has been complemented by the introduction of weekly departmental planning sessions to ensure that teaching is more precisely matched to pupils' starting points.
- You recognise that there is further work to do to ensure that teaching and additional support maximise rates of progress for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- school policies and systems for monitoring pupils' behaviour are reviewed regularly so that leaders can evaluate their effectiveness
- the number of fixed-term exclusions continue to reduce for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those eligible for free school meals
- new strategies to improve outcomes are evaluated regularly to ensure that recent improvements are sustained.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Newham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Niall Gallagher
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, your deputy headteacher, senior leaders and three members of the governing body, including the chair. We met with two newly qualified teachers and middle leaders. We visited both sites and spoke with pupils about their learning during the 13 lessons visited. We met with a group of pupils from Year 8 and Year 10 to hear their views of the school. We evaluated safeguarding procedures, including policies for keeping children safe, training, safeguarding checks and record keeping. We considered a range of school documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, pupils' assessment information and behaviour records.