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Mr Patrick Winston
Executive Principal
St Paul's Academy
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Dear Mr Winston

Short inspection of St Paul's Academy

Following my visit to the school on 6 June 2017 with Anne Hudson, 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 January 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Your inclusive approach and attention to pupils' welfare run through all aspects of the school. With support from the senior leadership team, you have ensured that the school continues to be a positive learning environment where pupils are well cared for. Governors provide you with thoughtful challenge and support. They are ambitious for all pupils to succeed.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have improved the systems used to monitor pupils' progress. Leaders now have an accurate view of the school's performance. For example, the school's analysis of 2016 examination outcomes shows that disadvantaged pupils did not make the same strong progress as their peers. As a consequence, improving the progress of disadvantaged pupils, particularly White British disadvantaged pupils, is a priority for the school.

Most teachers now use assessment information to plan activities which provide pupils with stretch and challenge, particularly the most able. Evidence we saw in pupils' books, for example in mathematics, Spanish and history, showed that the most able and disadvantaged pupils are making good progress, over time, from their starting points. However, this is not yet consistent across the curriculum and remains a key focus for school leaders.

Pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, report that they value the mentoring and support interventions that are in place to help them. However, analysis of the impact of these interventions to ensure that pupils make rapid and sustained progress is not sharp enough.

Safeguarding is effective

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Staff receive regular training on how to keep pupils safe. Leaders' awareness of local risks, including gang behaviour, radicalisation, mental health and online safety, underpins the effective support given to pupils. Staff understand the school's procedures for reporting any concerns and the systems to follow should any issues arise. The school is meticulous in its record keeping of concerns that are referred to external agencies and follow-up procedures are thorough. Pupils report that bullying is rare and that staff deal with any concerns effectively.

All required pre-employment staff checks are made and recorded accurately on the single central record. Recruitment files are well organised. Governors take their responsibilities for safeguarding seriously. A designated governor for safeguarding works effectively with the school's inclusion department.

Inspection findings

- In 2016, examination results showed that disadvantaged pupils, particularly higher attaining disadvantaged pupils, and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities made slower progress than other pupils from the same starting points nationally. Consequently, our first line of enquiry focused on leaders' actions to improve the current progress of these groups of pupils.
- Through rigorous monitoring and tracking, school leaders have accurately identified disadvantaged White British boys as the group most at risk of underachievement. School information indicates that high absence rates for this group are a significant factor in their underachievement. Leaders decided to allocate senior staff as mentors for pupils from White British disadvantaged backgrounds. This has meant that leaders have been able to respond quickly to the needs and concerns of individual pupils. As a result, both attendance and progress have improved for this group of pupils.
- The learning support provided to meet pupils' individual needs is variable in its effectiveness. Teaching assistants provide well-planned support in the classroom for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. In addition, before- and after-school booster classes ensure that these pupils do not fall behind in their learning. However, school leaders agree that their analysis of the impact of interventions for pupils eligible for pupil premium funding and for Year 7 pupils eligible for catch-up funding is not sufficiently rigorous.

- Leaders have decided to invest in resources to engage pupils more in reading, for example, with the appointment of a librarian and additional library resources to provide improved access to reading books for pupils. Nevertheless, more needs to be done to encourage reading, so that all pupils, particularly the disadvantaged, improve their reading and literacy skills more rapidly.
- The inspection also focused on the school's response to some uneven subject performance in the 2016 GCSE examinations. Results were strong in English, mathematics and a range of other subjects, but were weaker in geography and Spanish.
- Leaders have been quick to address issues of underperformance in both geography and Spanish. The school's assessment information shows, supported by reviews of pupils' work, that pupils are now making more rapid progress in both subjects. Observations of learning showed that teaching is now more effective in helping pupils to deepen their knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Finally, we looked at the extent to which teaching is consistently challenging the most able pupils to reach their potential. We found progress to be most rapid where teachers used assessment information to plan suitably challenging work and where questioning was used effectively. This was seen, for example, in mathematics, Spanish and history. However, this was not consistent across subjects and year groups.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers consistently provide activities that meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils, including the most able, so that their progress at least matches that of their peers
- rigorous and regular evaluation of additional funding improves provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and for those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

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

Yours sincerely

Carolyn Dickinson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors visited lessons to observe learning jointly with members of the school's senior leadership team. While in lessons, inspectors reviewed pupils' work and discussed their learning with them. They also listened to pupils reading, with a focus on those receiving additional support. Inspectors held meetings with leaders, staff, pupils and governors. The documentation reviewed included: leaders' evaluation of the school's performance and plans for development; attendance information; and procedures and policies, including those for attendance and safeguarding. Inspectors also considered the views of the 80 parents and 98 staff who responded to Ofsted's online surveys. There were no responses to the pupil survey.