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Ms Yvonne Powell  
Principal  
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Dear Ms Powell

### **Short inspection of Ark Walworth Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 31 January 2018 with Stephen Hall, 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 October 2014.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You and your leadership team put the well-being, learning and progress of pupils at the heart of everything you do. You have developed the school as a family, confident of its place in the local community but never complacent and always striving to do better. These school values are clearly communicated to pupils, who articulated them well in conversation with inspectors. Pupils thrive in this aspirational, challenging and caring ethos.

Leaders at all levels work effectively, showing good capacity for further improvement. This, together with strong teaching, is having a positive impact on pupils' learning and progress across the school. This is particularly true in the sixth form, where, in 2017, students' progress was consistently above average across the range of academic and vocational qualifications.

Initiatives such as the school's focus on purposeful talk in classrooms are also beginning to make a difference. Staff are knowledgeable about the purpose of structured talk and fully committed to ensuring that pupils benefit from opportunities to improve their communication skills and deepen their understanding.

School leaders know that further work needs to be done so that outcomes in mathematics are as good as in English; some inconsistencies in teaching remain, particularly in the extent to which most-able pupils are challenged.

Governors know the school very well and keep a close eye on the range of school information so that they can provide the challenge and support needed to bring

about further improvement. Through governors' panels, they have developed a key role in supporting pupils who may be at risk of exclusion and their families. The Ark schools' network supports the school effectively, for example making sure that assessments are accurate and interpreting pupils' progress information. Ark consultants provide valuable support for teaching and subjects when required.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders are knowledgeable about how to keep pupils safe and confident in applying policies and procedures. They develop effective partnerships with external agencies, such as the local authority, the police and a range of organisations, to ensure that pupils are safe. Staff are confident in applying the training they have received. They understand their responsibilities and how their roles as a subject teacher and as a tutor can contribute to pupils' well-being. Leaders are fully aware of the local risks to pupils and plan carefully tailored workshops and other interventions to support them. Workshops are also available to support parents and carers.

Pupils are clear that they feel safe. Pupils value the level of supervision and that staff take care that the local bus stops, shops and park are safe places at the end of the school day as pupils go home. Bullying is rare and pupils are confident that it is always dealt with. Pupils trust that all adults will support and help them if they have any concerns. Pupils value the support they get in the school's inclusion centre and through a range of external agencies. The individualised programmes are complemented by 'deep learning' days for whole-year groups with a focus on, for example, drug education and sex and relationships education. Pupils' feedback on these sessions contributes to the content of future days. Overall, the quality of the school's pastoral care of pupils is exceptional.

### **Inspection findings**

- The first inspection focus was on rates of exclusion from school. Historically, the proportion of pupils with a fixed-term exclusion has been above the national average and rising. However, a comparison with more recent figures shows that the number of pupils excluded and the number of days they were excluded for have fallen by almost a half.
- The school's exclusion policy is robust and transparent. Leaders' work with a range of external agencies to support pupils is highly effective. Pupils have confidence that the systems are applied fairly and acknowledge that the school does everything possible to support them. Pupils who have been excluded previously were effusive about the support they have had and are strong advocates for the school's ethos. One said, 'I feel that this school gives you everything'. Pupils largely self-manage their behaviour and are respectful of each other and adults. Pupils' behaviour is a strength of the school.

- Second, we considered the school's focus on outcomes for the most able pupils. There has been a marked improvement over time in the performance of this group relative to their peers nationally.
- The most able pupils are aspirational and ambitious for their future. They know what they are aiming for; they are knowledgeable about assessment criteria and understand the school's assessment processes. Teachers carefully analyse where pupils have not achieved marks on their question papers and design support so that they can close the gap and be successful in future. Pupils, for example in Year 11 mathematics, really value this personalised and well-targeted support.
- Written work in pupils' books shows the development of sophisticated evaluative skills, particularly in English and history. For example, in studying the civil rights movement in the USA, the most able Year 9 pupils were able to apply critical thinking skills to make judgements about the desegregation of education in the 1960s.
- However, school progress information shows that the most able group do not make as much progress as others. There are still some inconsistencies in teaching and in the level of challenge in work set across subjects. Leaders agree that these pupils are not yet making strong enough progress. Provision for most-able pupils is rightly a continuing priority for the school.
- Finally, we looked at pupils' progress in mathematics. This showed some improvement in 2017, but both progress and attainment in GCSE mathematics remained below those in English.
- Pupils are highly motivated and have positive attitudes towards learning in mathematics. They are confident in applying their knowledge and understanding and show resilience in overcoming any difficulties they have. Mathematics teaching usually demonstrates high expectations of what pupils can achieve, but there remains some variability in teaching quality.
- Teachers encourage pupils to reflect, share their understanding with each other and the teacher, and ask questions. Teachers check pupils' understanding through effective questioning and by developing dialogue and discussion. In these circumstances, teachers are able to skilfully identify where pupils have misconceptions and address them. Weaker teaching causes pupils to move on too quickly before they have had time to secure their conceptual understanding.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- in mathematics, teachers check pupils' understanding and give them sufficient time and opportunity to fully grasp mathematical concepts
- the most able pupils have consistently challenging work so that they make even more progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Janet Hallett  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

The inspector met with the principal and vice-principal to review the school's self-evaluation, agree the key focus of the inspection and plan the inspection activities. Inspectors visited classes with senior and middle leaders to observe pupils' learning and to look at their work. Inspectors listened to pupils' views in classes and at break and lunchtime, and also met with two groups of pupils to explore their views in more depth. The lead inspector met with the chair of governors and a representative of the Ark Trust. Inspectors evaluated a range of documentation, including safeguarding and behaviour records and the school improvement plan. Inspectors met with other leaders and members of staff to discuss the impact of their work and their views of the school. Inspectors considered the responses to the school's own parental surveys; there was only one response to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors considered the seven responses to the pupil questionnaire and the 27 responses to the staff questionnaire.