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6 April 2017

Ms Annie Gammon
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Dear Ms Gammon

Short inspection of Stoke Newington School and Sixth Form

Following my visit to the school on 8 March 2017 with Carolyn Dickinson, Her Majesty's 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have continued to create a learning environment where pupils are happy and safe, and value learning. Staff feel supported to develop their skills and teach enriching lessons that enable pupils to make good or better progress, particularly in the sixth form. Progress overall at GCSE and A level last year was significantly better than average, reflecting the successful work done.

Leaders have an accurate view of the school's performance. This is a consequence of the work carried out since the last inspection to refine systems for supporting and monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. There has also been an overhaul of the curriculum and assessment system. The views of pupils, parents and staff have been heeded as leaders review their work and plan for the future. This approach is recognised by the school community as a key aspect of the school's recent success in driving improvements. Leaders have been successful in managing changes to assessment and the curriculum for GCSE and A level while preserving the creative outlets that pupils value and enjoy.

The previous inspection identified the need to improve the consistency of teaching, learning and assessment, particularly by challenging pupils further and making best use of assessment. Teachers now benefit from a well-planned cycle of professional development which supports leaders' plans for improvement of the school.

An outcome of this is that teachers now routinely plan activities that stretch and challenge the most able. For example, they use questioning with skill to further maintain the momentum behind pupils' progress. The school's assessment procedures are robust. They are followed well by teachers and designed to promote the development of the knowledge and skills required at GCSE and A level, from the start of Year 7. Teachers are precise in their understanding of most pupils' needs and consequently activities are typically well pitched. The progress of disadvantaged pupils has been a particular focus of the school. Disadvantaged pupils now make broadly average progress while their peers make significantly better progress across a range of subjects including English, mathematics, science and modern foreign languages. The most able disadvantaged pupils do not make as much progress overall and are a focus of leaders' plans for further development.

The sixth form is a particular area of strength, with students making significantly better than average progress year on year since the previous inspection, particularly in the academic subjects that form the vast majority of those on offer. Leaders are rightly proud of the success that students enjoy in the sixth form and afterwards as they now move on to university courses and other career routes.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that there is a culture within the school where pupils' welfare is the number one priority. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Leaders have effective procedures in place that anticipate potential risks and can respond rapidly should the need arise. The school community's awareness of local risks, including gangs, radicalisation, online safety and mental health, has underpinned the school's work. Staff are effective in identifying and supporting pupils who may be more vulnerable to such risks. As a result, pupils, parents and staff consider this to be a safe, happy and welcoming school where bullying is rare, concerns are dealt with effectively and diversity is celebrated. Inspectors agree with this view.

The school's policies and procedures for safeguarding pupils' well-being are robust. All required pre-employment checks are made on staff and recorded accurately on the single central record. Recruitment files are of high quality. Staff receive routine training and have a secure understanding of both the potential risks and how to manage them if needed. Governors are skilled and knowledgeable, and support the school's safeguarding culture; they take their responsibilities very seriously.

Inspection findings

- At the start of this inspection, we agreed to prioritise four lines of enquiry. We started by considering how well disadvantaged pupils, particularly the most able and boys, are supported in English, science and humanities subjects.

- Evidence gathered on inspection demonstrates that this has been a key focus for development over the past year. Leaders have introduced a number of strategies to improve disadvantaged pupils' performance. The review of the curriculum has been a significant part of this, refining targets and activities better to meet disadvantaged pupils' and boys' needs.
- Governors are astute in their understanding of the potential barriers to disadvantaged pupils' progress and ensure that leaders' work supports those pupils to do as well as their peers. Governors share leaders' ambition for all pupils in the school and provide effective support and challenge to leaders.
- As a result of leaders' work, disadvantaged pupils and boys receive more bespoke additional support than in the past. Disadvantaged pupils have attained increasingly well at GCSE for the past three years, diminishing the difference with their peers, and made average progress in 2016. In modern foreign languages, disadvantaged pupils and their peers made significantly better progress than the national average. However, there remained a difference in school between disadvantaged pupils' progress and that of their peers overall, for example in humanities and science.
- Current assessment information indicates that disadvantaged pupils across year groups are now doing better. However, the most able disadvantaged continue to make slower progress than should be expected of them.
- We also prioritised the sixth form as a key line of enquiry, specifically whether all groups of students are being supported to excel. We looked into this because, historically, progress at AS level had been weaker than at A level and on vocational courses, and fewer students were progressing to sustained education, employment and training than is typical nationally.
- Much work has gone into structuring the provision offered on 16 to 19 study programmes so that students have a range of choices and receive highly effective pastoral support and guidance throughout their time in the sixth form. As a result, students' performance at AS level is far better now, laying the foundations for further A-level studies.
- The academically focused curriculum is suitable for the students who apply to stay on and a higher proportion of students now complete their programmes than was the case historically. The sixth form is an increasingly popular destination after Year 11, both for the school's own pupils and pupils from other schools. The majority of students move on to appropriate university courses and some pursue apprenticeships. A greater proportion of disadvantaged students successfully move on to sustained education, training and employment than is typical for other schools nationally.
- Our third line of enquiry looked at how effectively pupils are supported who require additional catch-up support to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. Recently introduced systems to enhance the support that pupils already received is helping to embed broader whole-school work to improve pupils' literacy skills.

- Leaders' review of the curriculum is linked to the catch-up strategies now in place, which have focused on developing higher level skills earlier in pupils' time in school. Pupils who speak English as an additional language and are in the early stages of learning the language are particularly well supported. This reflects leaders' precise understanding of how the school's intake is changing over time.
- Finally, we investigated how well pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported, particularly in improving their attendance and reducing the proportion who feature in exclusion incidents.
- The special educational needs coordinator and the broader pastoral team work effectively to improve these pupils' attendance and provide them with schoolwork if attendance is not possible. The internal exclusion (IMPACT) room is used well as an alternative to exclusion, providing therapeutic support to those who require it. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities made good progress at GCSE last year and current assessment information indicates that they continue to do well.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers consistently plan activities that meet disadvantaged pupils' needs, particularly in challenging the most able disadvantaged, so that their progress at least matches that of their peers.

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

Yours sincerely

Matt Tiplin
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors:

- visited lessons jointly with members of the school's senior leadership team to observe learning. While in lessons, inspectors scrutinised pupils' work and discussed pupils' learning with them
- listened to pupils read who are receiving additional support through the school's catch-up programme
- held meetings with leaders, staff, pupils and governors in order to explore the key lines of enquiry and the progress made by the school since the last inspection
- reviewed documentation including: assessment information; behaviour and attendance information; leaders' evaluation of the school's performance and plans for development; procedures and policies, including those for attendance, safeguarding and special educational needs support; and minutes of governing body meetings
- considered the views of the 170 parents, 47 staff and 48 pupils who responded to Ofsted's online surveys.