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Ms April Saunders
Headteacher
The Royal Liberty School
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Dear Ms Saunders

Short inspection of The Royal Liberty School

Following my visit to the school on 5 February 2019 with Ian Morris, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in May 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 and the senior leadership team have a comprehensive understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. You have put in place systems that hold middle leaders to account, for example regular meetings which focus on key areas for improvement. This consistent approach is also visible in classrooms across the school, for instance in the system students use to review their work. An additional emphasis is placed on ensuring that disadvantaged pupils do well. This is in response to the recent underperformance of this group in GCSE examinations.

Middle leaders are effective and contribute well to raising standards of teaching and learning in their areas. Senior and middle leaders meet regularly to check that pupils are learning as well as they should. Governors know the school through regular visits, their involvement in learning walks and reviews of pupils' performance with leaders. They draw on their experience and training to provide timely and effective support and challenge to the school's leaders. Additional support from the trust, for example through sharing lead practitioners for English and mathematics, enables leaders to make further improvements in teaching and learning.

Most parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, were very supportive of the school. Several parents of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) praised the school's individualised support and care.

Pupils are well behaved, respectful and courteous. They appreciate the guidance and challenge they receive in lessons and the encouragement from their teachers. Parents value the sense of community, which is palpable throughout the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Clear and rigorous systems for staff checks and pupil records are in place. These are detailed, are of a high quality and are kept meticulously updated.

Governors have received extensive training, and a clear plan is in place to ensure that this crucial area of leadership is never left unattended. Leaders at all levels are fully aware of safeguarding risks that are prevalent in the local area, such as gang activity and knife crime. These inform training for staff and pupils. Regular tests check adults' understanding of safeguarding issues.

The school responds swiftly when concerns arise. Leaders and other staff work in partnership with external agencies to safeguard pupils' welfare. Pupils said that they feel safe in school and in the local area. They spoke positively about the safer internet days and the anti-bullying steering group led by a middle leader. These activities complement the school's new behaviour policy, which sets clear expectations in and out of the classroom. Staff provide a visible but unobtrusive presence around the school when pupils are moving between lessons.

The school has effective systems in place to ensure the safety of pupils, especially the most vulnerable, when they are not on site. An electronic attendance register is used to make sure that any pupils educated off site are accounted for on a daily basis. The school uses resources from the trust when excluding pupils who are at risk to continue to ensure their safety.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed to focus on the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils. GCSE results from previous years indicate that these pupils did not make as much progress as other pupils nationally.
- Disadvantaged pupils typically account for around one third of the school's population. Leaders' use of additional funding to support these pupils is well planned. Leaders regularly visit classrooms to monitor its impact on teaching and learning.
- Teachers have good awareness of pupils who are disadvantaged and are therefore able to give them priority when necessary. Inspectors spoke to disadvantaged pupils who have been appointed as learning champions. They spoke with enthusiasm and confidence, showed pride in their work and were able to demonstrate good progress through their books.
- You have strong systems to monitor attendance and follow up where this does not meet expectations. As a result, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, which was below national rates in 2018, has now improved. However, the rate of

persistent absence for the same pupils remains greater than that of their peers.

- The second focus for the inspection was pupils' progress and attainment in English, mathematics, science and the humanities. Historically, GCSE results in these subjects showed some underperformance. However, there was an improvement in pupils' progress in 2018.
- Leaders undertake rigorous monitoring with support from the trust and external consultants. The effectiveness of middle leaders is consistent across departments. This is as a result of regular opportunities for staff to meet and share good practice during training sessions.
- The school's current assessment information suggests an improving trend in English, mathematics, science and the humanities. This view was supported by work seen in classes during this inspection. In Year 10 mathematics, for example, we saw teachers skilfully guiding students to apply previously learned skills in harder contexts, such as moving from calculating the area of a pyramid to that of a cone. The insistence on improving work supports pupils in preparing for assessments. One commented: 'It really helps when we come to revise.'
- Teachers' strong subject knowledge is also used well when correcting pupils' misunderstandings. Work in pupils' books shows clear progression over time. For example, in English, pupils are encouraged to draft and repeatedly revise their work before settling on a high-quality final version. Pupils talk about this work with interest and in depth. However, in history and science, inspectors saw less evidence of challenge at the highest level.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all pupils are appropriately challenged and that they receive precise guidance about how to reach the highest levels in history and science
- actions to raise the achievements and reduce the persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils are continued to narrow the differences with other pupils nationally.

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

Yours sincerely

Luisa Bonelli
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors looked at a wide range of school documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, assessment information and documents relating to safeguarding. We visited classes with senior leaders, looked at work in pupils' books and spoke with staff and pupils. We met with school leaders, the leader with responsibility for safeguarding, the assessment manager and the pupil premium coordinator. We held meetings with the chief executive officer from the multi-academy trust. In addition, we analysed the 39 responses to Ofsted's online survey for parents, the 38 responses to the staff questionnaire and the 55 responses to the pupil survey.