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Ms Rhonda Murthar
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Murthar

Short inspection of Stewards Academy

Following my visit to the school on 8 March 2017 with Martin Brown, 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 June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Visitors to Stewards Academy are warmly welcomed, and immediately struck by the school's positive climate and the cohesiveness of its staff and pupils. You balance nicely the demand for high standards with a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. The school runs like clockwork: pupils are impeccably behaved and everything is purposeful and well organised.

Stewards Academy has a well-deserved reputation locally, which is reflected in the overwhelmingly positive comments on Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire). Parents who responded were fulsome in their support for you and your staff; 95% of respondents said they would recommend the school to other parents. They praised a wide range of aspects of the school's work including the 'astounding extra-curricular activities', 'the incredible standard of school productions' and 'fabulous trips'. Parents recognise the time and effort that staff put into supporting the pupils, with specific mention of 'the fantastic transition arrangements' and the 'brilliant pastoral support managers'.

The school has benefited from strong continuity in its leadership and governance. Leaders have preserved and consolidated what the school does well while constantly seeking ways to improve. Staff value the excellent support that the school provides for them. As headteacher, you have modelled your high

expectations for everyone to follow. Importantly, the school's stability does not make it inward-looking; staff are ever-alert to ways of widening the pupils' horizons, aspirations and experiences, and of improving further.

A few parents expressed anxiety about whether the school would maintain its standards when you retire at the end of this academic year. However, leadership capacity across governance and the senior and middle leadership teams is strong. The governing body has provided good strategic leadership for the school. Governors have a broad skill set, are well informed and effectively hold senior leaders to account. They are proud of what the school has achieved but realistic about where results need to improve.

Teaching observed during the inspection was lively and engaging. Work was well planned, with a wide range of high-quality resources to support learning. Classrooms provide a stimulating environment, and good relationships between adults and pupils mean learning proceeds apace, and without interruption. In every class, pupils demonstrated positive attitudes to learning; they sustained their concentration, listened carefully and worked steadily. Assessment is a notable strength: teachers provide high-quality feedback to pupils so that they know where they have done well and what they can do to improve.

Pupils' behaviour, judged outstanding at the last inspection, was exemplary during this visit. Pupils show remarkable maturity in their interactions with one another and with adults. These positive attitudes are reflected in their good attendance and the care they take to complete their work to a high standard. Around the school, pupils are considerate and courteous. They rise to the challenge of having additional responsibilities and are highly appreciative of the unwavering support that their teachers provide. When asked what was best about Stewards Academy, the pupils simply said 'the teachers'.

The pupils, parents and staff say that the school is like a family, in the best sense of the word, in that everyone looks out for one another and appreciates the efforts, attributes and achievements of others. After recently eating lunch with you as headteacher, one young pupil brought you in a chocolate cake, so worried was he that you were not eating enough!

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors, are meticulous in making sure that the school meets all statutory safeguarding requirements. Policies and procedures are reviewed regularly and thoroughly. The school's systems for recording incidents of concern are very rigorous.

Training and induction of new staff are thorough. All adults show vigilance and awareness of different aspects of safeguarding. Your close monitoring of the attendance of vulnerable pupils, and pupils who attend off-site provision for some or all of the week, means that you know they are safe.

The curriculum promotes all dimensions of safety and welfare through a comprehensive taught programme, assemblies and drop-down days. Pupils are alert to risks including those posed by the injudicious use of the internet and the inappropriate use of social media; a recent assembly on the dangers of 'sexting' raised awareness for younger pupils.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe and how to access help if they have any concerns. Central to this is the school's strongly affirmative culture and emphasis on pupils' individuality: all forms of achievement are recognised, and diversity and difference are positively celebrated. This climate of openness, mutual respect and tolerance gives pupils confidence to speak out and support one another. The low level of bullying incidents is testimony to this strong climate.

Almost all parents responding to Parent View are confident that their children are safe at school, and that their child is well looked after. Some parents specifically noted that the school had responded swiftly to resolve their concerns. Several commended the school's work to promote pupils' emotional well-being. This exemplary work was recognised by a recent visit from the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge.

Inspection findings

- The inspection was steered by three key lines of enquiry to check whether the school remains good. The first issue was whether disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress, given that published performance data for 2015 and 2016 indicates some underachievement. Senior leaders have taken suitable steps to improve the progress of these pupils. A new coordinator for special educational needs has recently taken up post and is making necessary changes to strengthen provision.
- Support for disadvantaged pupils is well organised and sharply focused. Assessments in Year 7 are used well to identify and remove any barriers to success, and teachers make good use of the pupil passport for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to plan for progress. This ensures that pupils are effectively targeted for additional support and guidance so that they benefit from the same opportunities as others. Work in pupils' books shows they are making better progress.
- The second line of enquiry stemmed from the findings of the previous inspection, which asked the school to explore ways to extend pupils' learning. Inspectors evaluated the extent to which the most able pupils are challenged to reach their full potential.
- Leaders are ambitious for all pupils, including the most able, from the moment they arrive in Year 7. Pupils are encouraged to have high aspirations and are given the experiences and support to enable this to become an achievable reality. A comprehensive programme of careers guidance including visits to universities helps pupils understand the different paths open to them and the merits of higher-level apprenticeships, as well as further and higher education.
- The school's 'gifted and talented' programme recognises and nurtures pupils'

different attributes, including their academic potential, wider talents and leadership qualities. Pupils are proud to represent their school as prefects and council members. The most academically gifted pupils can study classics and benefit from participating in the 'Honours Club' programme.

- Although teachers consider the needs of the most able in their planning, questioning is sometimes too superficial to extend pupils' understanding and explore issues in depth. Pupils sometimes wait patiently to be asked a question or be given additional work, and their learning could be extended.
- Our third line of enquiry related to the curriculum. Published performance data suggests that in previous years results in key subjects, including modern foreign languages, humanities and some vocational options, have lagged behind others. Leaders are aware of weaknesses in these curriculum areas, and have taken effective steps to strengthen provision. Modern foreign languages, in particular, has been weaker in the past, but staff changes and close monitoring by senior leaders is securing necessary improvement.
- The curriculum provides suitable breadth and focus to meet the varying needs of pupils on different learning pathways and makes sure they are well prepared for adult life. The proportion of pupils who, having left school, have sustained employment, education or training placements is above the local and national figures.
- The school places due emphasis on promoting high standards of numeracy and literacy, ensuring that all pupils, including those who have struggled at primary school, are able to access the wider curriculum. Staff achieve notable success in encouraging pupils of all ages to read regularly and enjoy books.
- The school adopts a 'growth mind-set' philosophy which means that pupils' potential is not limited by their primary school achievements and experiences. Instead, pupils are actively encouraged to tackle new challenges, underpinned by the impressive range of extra-curricular enrichment opportunities and trips. During the inspection, 12 girls attended a STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) event in London. Pupils have been successful in national and local competitions, including third place in last year's UK 'rocket challenge'. There are many excellent opportunities for pupils to develop skills in sport (especially swimming), drama and music, and to take part in trips and residential visits, including to Finland.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that the achievements under the current headteacher's leadership are sustained, going forwards, with a sharp focus on ensuring that:

- the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities matches that of others with similar starting points
- when teaching, teachers seize opportunities to extend and deepen pupils'

learning and achieve academic excellence, particularly for the most able pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, your senior leaders and nominated middle leaders and staff with specific responsibilities, including your newly appointed special educational needs coordinator and the mentor for children looked after, to discuss provision and outcomes for particular groups of pupils. We met with six governors, including the chair of the governing body, and with a group of pupils selected by you. We scrutinised a wide range of school documentation, including your self-evaluation, development plans and assessment information for all year groups. We interviewed the school HR manager and designated safeguarding lead to examine the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures, and the records of checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children. Inspectors undertook observations of teaching and learning across the school, in 19 classrooms, spoke with pupils about their learning and evaluated the work in their books. We took account of the views of 64 parent responses and 34 text responses submitted on Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. We also considered the school's staff, parent and pupil surveys, collated over time, since no returns were submitted to either the pupil or staff online surveys for the inspection.