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Mrs Annette Turner
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Dear Mrs Turner

Short inspection of Southend YMCA Community School

Following my visit to the school on 28 February 2019 with Susan Cox, 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 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You lead your team with enthusiasm and provide decisive leadership. Leaders work effectively as a cohesive team and are ambitious for the school. Members of the governing body, staff and pupils value your leadership and relentless commitment to improving the school.

Leaders have taken effective action to maintain and build upon the strengths identified in the previous inspection. You have successfully addressed the recommendation to further improve the quality of teaching and to further develop the leadership and management of the school.

The school provides a calm, well-ordered learning environment. Relationships between adults and pupils are positive. Classrooms are well resourced and provide a positive learning atmosphere. Adults work hard to raise the aspirations of pupils. Throughout the school, pupils demonstrate their strong desire to learn. Pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare are a strong feature of this school's success.

Staff morale is high and staff value the support of leaders. Staff work tirelessly to support pupils to develop their self-esteem and engage in learning. This was evidenced by pupils' behaviour in class and at breaktimes and lunchtimes. Parents and carers appreciate the care and understanding given by adults to their children.

The committed and experienced governors fulfil their responsibilities well. They are steadfast in their mission to make the school the best it can be and are astute in scrutinising the school's effectiveness. Governors bring a breadth of knowledge and expertise. The governing body uses the information it receives about the school's performance to ask pertinent questions that challenge and support the school. You work well with governors, welcoming their commitment, energy and experience.

Safeguarding is effective.

A strong safeguarding culture permeates the school. Leaders and the governing body have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Administration relating to recruitment and training is up to date. The members of the safeguarding team are knowledgeable, work well together and liaise with outside agencies appropriately. Records are detailed and secure. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibility to keep pupils safe. Rigorous systems are in place for staff to pass on any concerns. Leaders are aware of local safeguarding issues and ensure that staff and pupils are given strategies to deal with these effectively. Staff know the pupils well and are quick to identify any changes that may suggest a pupil is at risk. Training for adults is comprehensive and regular, including for the 'Prevent' duty (the government's anti-extremism programme). Pupils say they feel safe and know who to talk to if they have any concerns.

Many pupils enter the school with very poor rates of attendance. A variety of interventions are successfully used to increase attendance. Despite this work, some pupils still miss too much school. Leaders are redoubling their efforts to reduce these absences by working more closely with parents. Improving pupils' attendance remains a priority for the school.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, inspectors considered the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements; how well leaders and governors have addressed the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection; how effective the curriculum is at motivating pupils to learn and make good progress; pupil outcomes; and whether transition arrangements are effective.
- All staff with leadership roles have clearly defined responsibilities and are accountable for improvements in the areas they lead. You have made less progress in resolving the issue about sharing leadership responsibilities. There is still more work to be done to ensure a more evenly distributed leadership to enable continued improvement.
- Leaders and governors have an accurate picture of the strengths of the school and what needs more work. Strategic planning has been strengthened so that the targets for improvement are clear. Plans for improvement are not currently precise enough with accurate timescales to hold both leaders and teachers to account for the impact of their work.

- Governors rigorously question and monitor the impact of actions taken to improve teaching and learning. Governor minutes reflect consistent support and challenge to the leadership team. Statutory policies are updated on a regular basis and ratified by the governing body. However, the governors have not kept a watchful eye on the school website, the contents of which do not reflect the school's diligent work, for example on the curriculum.
- Leaders have continued to build on the effective teaching, learning and assessment found at the previous inspection. Leaders have thought carefully about pupils' barriers to learning and have created a curriculum to confront these head on. A purposeful and relevant curriculum, which is rich with experiences, allows pupils to develop their knowledge, skills for life and independence well. Pupils make good progress from their starting points. They do not progress as well in mathematics, particularly the most able pupils, due to teachers not having high enough expectations.
- Scrutiny of pupils' work in books shows that, over time, they make good progress and demonstrate a pride in their work. The marking policy is used consistently across the school. Spelling and errors in grammar and punctuation are corrected. Appropriate verbal feedback is provided to pupils so that they understand how well they are doing and how to move on in their learning.
- The school prepares pupils well for the next stage of their education. A range of accredited courses are in place and the number of pupils achieving accreditations has increased year on year. As a result of the high expectations, pupils experience a great deal of success in these courses. The school is rightly proud of their achievements.
- Transition arrangements are a strength of the school. There are successful systems in place to get to know pupils when they join the school. Your effective transition arrangements on entry ensure that pupils move effortlessly into the new learning environment. The vast majority of pupils move on to education, employment or training. Pupils are well supported to make appropriate applications and their transition to college is monitored carefully.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- distributed leadership continues to evolve, so that the school can improve and grow in an authentic manner
- plans for improvement are precise, with clear milestones for success, so that leaders and teachers can be held fully accountable for the impact of their actions
- mathematics is delivered with enough challenge, so that all pupils make as much progress as they can, especially the most able
- they further improve the regular attendance of all pupils
- the website is fully up to date, so that the information relating to the curriculum accurately reflects the content provided for pupils in each year group.

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

Yours sincerely

Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with senior leaders, teaching staff, representatives of the governing body and a local authority representative. A telephone conversation was held with the chair of governors and the school improvement adviser. Inspectors observed pupils as they worked in lessons, and they looked at their books. The vast majority of observations were carried out jointly with a member of the leadership team.

Inspectors also spoke with staff and pupils in meetings as well as informally when they moved around the school. They looked at a range of documents, including on safeguarding, pupils' attendance and behaviour, the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans and information about governance.