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Ms Alison Downey  
Principal  
Ark Putney Academy  
Pullman Gardens  
Putney  
London  
SW15 3DG

Dear Ms Downey

### **Short inspection of Ark Putney Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 29 March 2017 with David Boyle, 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 March 2013. The school also had an English subject survey inspection in January 2014.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You became principal of the school in September 2013. You have built a strong and effective senior and middle leadership team to help you to improve both the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils.

You have been successful in addressing the areas identified from the previous inspection. The overall progress made by pupils at the end of key stage 4 in both 2014 and 2015 across a range of subjects, including English and mathematics, was well above national averages. You decided that the school would 'opt in' to use the new Progress 8 measure in 2015. The school's Progress 8 was significantly above the national average. Progress in English has been significantly above national averages for the last three years. This shows that leaders have been effective in addressing the issues raised by the English subject survey inspection. Although in 2016 Progress 8 was lower than in 2015, it was in line with the national average. In 2016, girls typically achieved better than other girls nationally and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieved well compared with other pupils nationally across a range of subjects. Outcomes for students in the sixth form on academic courses have been consistently good, and outstanding on work-related courses.

You have identified that the most able pupils in particular are not making the same progress as other most-able pupils nationally. You are putting into place effective strategies to improve outcomes for this group, including those most-able pupils who are disadvantaged. The impact of this can be seen in outcomes in key stage 3.

The school has benefited from a £30 million refurbishment, adding new facilities and providing a motivating environment both for staff to work in and for pupils to learn. Year-group sizes in key stage 4 are small. The school is now becoming more popular with parents and carers. There are 180 pupils who have accepted places to start at the school in September 2017.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Pupils who spoke to inspectors both informally and formally were absolutely clear that they felt safe in school. The words of a pupil in Year 7 reflected the views of many, 'I feel that I can trust the teachers.' The school's strategies to educate pupils on staying safe are secure. Pupils can speak knowledgeably about healthy eating, sexting, road safety, female genital mutilation, and drugs and alcohol misuse. Pupils, and students in the sixth form live out British values: differences are celebrated, pupils interact well with each other and bullying is not accepted. However, some pupils and students are not as confident as others when they speak about radicalisation and extremism and the different forms it can take. You are aware of this and have plans in place for the summer term to deliver focused work on developing pupils' understanding of both radicalisation and extremism. Pupils' behaviour during the fire drill which took place during the inspection was excellent. Pupils reacted calmly and safely throughout the fire drill.

Leaders know the possible risks to pupils in the area local to the school. Leaders talk knowledgeably about pupils and local risks, and are proactive in meeting pupils' needs so that they are safe. Referrals to external agencies are made quickly. Leaders keep detailed records of any actions taken to support pupils. Paperwork is generally well organised. You are making improvements to the school's record keeping, including your decision to move to an electronic tracking system. You and the governing body have employed additional experienced and qualified staff to improve pupils' welfare. The impact of this can be seen in improved attendance rates, both overall and for disadvantaged pupils. Pupils are supported effectively through counselling and early help that improves their emotional and mental well-being.

Responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey for parents, were mixed. Although only 23 parents responded, most agreed that their child was safe in school and well looked after. The school's own surveys of parents' views, for example for Year 8 and Year 11, showed that the vast majority felt that their child was safe in school. You, governors and staff are working to improve parental engagement so that parents have a better understanding of the school's work and the impact it is having on improving the welfare and outcomes of their children.

## Inspection findings

- We agreed to focus on the actions that leaders are taking to improve the progress made by the most able pupils at the school. This was because in 2016, the progress this group made was below that of other most-able pupils nationally.
- You are putting in place effective strategies to stretch and challenge the most able. Leaders' decision to focus on developing pupils' critical thinking and evaluation skills is part of the school's focus on developing pupils' writing skills. Observations in lessons, reviewing most-able pupils' assessments and learning in books show that this is working well. Pupils are developing their analytical skills; for example, to compare and contrast in English and in geography, they write confidently using subject terminology.
- Teachers know the pupils well as individuals. They have a clear understanding of pupils' differing starting points and use this information to adapt their planning. Pupils join the school with standards of attainment that are significantly below the national average. The number of most-able pupils in each year is typically small. Your assessment information shows that the progress of the most able is below that of their peers but differences are reducing. You agree that it will take more time to ensure that teachers consistently and effectively challenge the most able pupils across the school. This is one of your main priorities.
- We also looked at how leaders have adapted the way they spend pupil premium funding. This was because in 2016, some differences in the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally were evident for both lower and higher attaining groups. Middle-attaining disadvantaged pupils, by far the larger proportion of pupils, typically achieved well, particularly in English and mathematics.
- You have identified that one of the main barriers to the achievement of disadvantaged pupils was that of low attendance. The strategies you use to improve attendance rates, for example, employing a dedicated attendance officer, are working. Attendance rates for this year are just over 95% and attendance rates for disadvantaged pupils are just over 94%. Persistent absence has reduced sharply.
- You have also spent more of the pupil premium funding on strategies to improve progress for disadvantaged pupils in mathematics. Observations in mathematics and an analysis of your assessment information show that differences in progress between disadvantaged pupils and their peers are generally small. Lower attaining pupils make much more rapid progress than previously. Governors are rigorous in challenging leaders over the use of the funding and are equally knowledgeable about how it is spent and the impact it is having.
- In 2016, students did not achieve well in a small number of GCSE and work-related courses. These were catering, product design and sport. You have put in place effective action plans to improve results. Through better teaching and more rigorous tracking, outcomes are improving.

- Lastly, we agreed to look at the school's work to reduce the rate of exclusions from school for poor behaviour. This was because exclusion rates were above the national average.
- Leaders have focused on developing the six academy 'pillars' of: effort; enthusiasm; independence; teamwork; commitment and community. Your work to embed these 'pillars' and your decision to stamp out defiance and low-level disruption have led to a small increase in exclusions. However, exclusions for serious incidents have dropped sharply, as has the number of pupils being excluded more than once. Pupils are motivated to behave well and focus on learning by the school's effective use of rewards.
- You have identified that careers information, advice and guidance are not developed enough. You plan to increase pupils' awareness of further education and career pathways in order to motivate pupils for the next stages in their education. You are now tracking pupils' destinations more carefully. You are giving better and more targeted advice than in the past to ensure that there are no pupils who are not in education, employment or training when they leave the school, either at the end of Year 11 or after the sixth form.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers routinely provide challenge for the most able so these pupils make the same good or better progress in their learning as their peers
- they continue to develop strategies to engage parents in the work of the school
- they develop and embed the school's strategies for careers guidance, particularly at key stages 3 and 4, so that pupils are motivated and inspired about their next steps.

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

Yours sincerely

Sam Hainey

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

Inspectors carried out the following activities during the inspection:

- meetings with you and other senior leaders, middle leaders, representatives from the governing body and the Ark Central Team
- visits to lessons with senior leaders in a range of subjects and year groups
- meetings with groups of pupils, including students in the sixth form, to discuss the school's approach to keeping pupils safe and ensuring equality of opportunity
- evaluation of information provided by the school, including safeguarding records, exclusion records, bullying logs, the school's self-evaluation and information about pupils' progress
- discussions with pupils and staff informally throughout the school day
- consideration of the views of 23 parents who responded to Parent View, 16 responses to the staff survey and the school's own surveys of parents' views of the school's work.