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Ms A Gage  
The Victory Academy  
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Kent  
ME4 5JB

Dear Ms Gage

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Victory Academy**

Following my visit to your academy on 20 November 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection the academy was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The academy should take further action to:

- judge its success more on how well students are learning in each subject now that key strategies are in place
- ensure that governors now hold senior leaders to account strongly for improvements in outcomes for students, and the narrowing of gaps in achievement.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and the executive principal, representatives of the governing body and the Chief Executive Officer of the academy's sponsors, The Thinking Schools Academy Trust (TSAT). There was a telephone conversation with the Chair of the Interim Management Group. The

academy's action plan was evaluated. We visited several lessons briefly to see teaching and learning.

## **Context**

Since the previous inspection, the academy has changed its name from Bishop of Rochester Academy to The Victory Academy. There have been adjustments to the roles and responsibilities of members of the senior team; other leaders in the academy are now part of an academy extended leadership team. There are new leaders of science, the performing arts, humanities and languages from September 2015. Three middle leaders have been designated as specialist leaders of education.

## **Main findings**

You, the Executive Principal and governors all demonstrate a very strong sense of drive and ambition for this academy. All aspects of its work have come under the microscope since the new sponsors took charge. Senior leaders now understand the academy's strengths and development needs very well. Existing strengths in culture and provision have been rapidly identified and nurtured, but there is a palpable sense of everyone wanting a step-change in outcomes for students here and a readiness to bring about whatever changes are necessary. Ambition is being fostered, exciting links are developing with the Royal Navy and the academy's strengths in the creative and performing arts are being channelled energetically towards the achievement of a prestigious national award.

The sponsor's concentration on developing students' thinking and learning skills is giving a very strong steer to the necessary improvements in teaching and learning. The specific strategies introduced bring consistency to the experience of students as they move between subjects, and provide a clear and rational framework for the organisation of staff training. There are indications that teaching is already beginning to improve in several key subjects as a result.

The academy's development plan is a lengthy and very detailed document. It covers all key aspects of its work, and addresses priorities clearly and explicitly. There is a very useful blend of large-scale tactics, and some very clear essential detail around what exactly will be done, often spelled out on a term-by-term basis. This gives senior leaders and governors a very good grip on what should be happening when, who will be responsible and how processes will be evaluated. So far, there is an understandably greater concentration on the quality of the implementation of these strategies than their impact on how securely students' knowledge, skills and understanding in every subject is improving and how gaps in achievement between certain groups are closing. However, senior leaders track overall progress in each subject towards appropriately ambitious targets closely, and there is some evidence of gains in important areas such as literacy skills.

Examination outcomes for students in 2015 showed improvement from 2014. Many students arrive at the academy with very low achievement at Key Stage 2. The proportion achieving five or more grade C passes at GCSE, including English and mathematics, remained significantly lower than the national average but it was better than in 2014 because this year group made better progress over their time here. Students' progress in English was much better than it has been in the past. The progress made by students by the end of their courses in the sixth form in vocational subjects and at A-level was also better, overall. The proportion of students achieving the highest grades in AS examinations was better, but overall progress in Year 12 in academic subjects remained low. Many of these improvements can be attributed to the very focused support provided by TSAT in the lead up to the examinations.

The wide range of strategies to help students currently in Key Stage 4 catch up on previously poor learning are well received by students. Attendance at revision classes in Year 11 is good and many are rewarded by being able to attend 'Golden Ticket Friday'. Homework is now expected to be completed by all students. There is a useful online system in place to inform parents of what is set and when it is due in. Very few students have railed against the tighter and more structured approaches to learning and the higher expectations in place from this term.

A new curriculum structure in Year 7 is providing good support for the relatively large proportion of students who arrive at the academy with low levels of literacy and numeracy. It provides an appropriately strong focus on students acquiring these basic skills. The topic approach enables them to keep up in most other subjects. Early indications are that this is supporting much better progress. More focused provision from this term is also benefiting those in Year 8 with weaknesses in basic skills.

There is a range of good strategies to improve attendance and more rapid responses to any student whose attendance falls below the high expectations. These strategies include more frequent calls home at an earlier stage and home visits to the parents of poor attenders. As a result, the overall attendance of students has improved to be nearer the national average this term and there are signs of a reduction in the differences in attendance between different groups. Senior leaders place a significant emphasis on students' good attitudes to learning and their cooperation with staff. Good behaviour is rewarded with an online system of points that can be spent in the academy on rewards.

There is a very useful set of experience and expertise represented on the interim management board. Members of the board have audited their own skills closely and have checked that they can support the academy's work appropriately strongly. Governors are well informed about the academy's work and are justifiably pleased with the better systems and structures in place. They are aware that a shift of focus from the quality of implementation of these systems onto their impact on students'

knowledge, understanding, knowledge and skills in every subject is now necessary to enable them to hold the leadership even more closely to account.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the academy until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The academy is benefiting from the support of its new sponsors. The strong emphasis TSAT places on the development of thinking and learning skills is clearly changing the nature of teaching and learning in the academy; this is providing new and welcome consistency in expectations and practices across classrooms.

The sponsors are closely involved in the work of the academy at this crucial stage of its development. The executive principal for Medway's TSAT secondary sponsored academies and the trust's lead professional for attendance and safeguarding are based at the academy. They maintain oversight of the effectiveness of its work on a day-by-day basis. Other TSAT staff visit the academy frequently and make good contributions to the delivery of the priorities in the development plan. Links with the other TSAT academies in the area have become strong and productive. There is good quality support for the teaching and leadership of religious studies, geography and history from Chatham Grammar School for Boys and The Rochester Grammar School and its teaching school alliance, New Horizons. Joint observations of teaching and learning with their staff in these and other subjects enable the academy to be confident of the accuracy of its judgements.

A coordinated sixth form timetable between the academy and the mixed sixth form of Chatham Grammar School for Boys enables students at the academy to move across both sites for different AS and A-level subjects. The academy maintains Level 2 and Level 3 vocational provisions on its own site. As a pilot scheme, a small number of Year 8 boys and girls are now educated full-time at Chatham Grammar School for Boys to offer them high levels of academic challenge.

The trust undertook a useful initial review of the academy's use of the pupil premium which has pointed the need for, and will steer the focus of, a more detailed external review to be undertaken soon.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Medway, the Education Funding Agency and the Chief Executive Officer of The Thinking Schools Academy Trust. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Alan Taylor-Bennett  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**