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Mrs Judi O'Leary
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs O'Leary

Short inspection of Whitemoor Academy

Following my visit to the academy on 23 February 2016, 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 February 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the academy since the last inspection. Whitemoor is an orderly and well-managed academy. You provide purposeful leadership, which operates through effective systems and well-established ways of working. At the same time, you and your team are looking constantly for things that could be improved. Your approach to improving the academy is based on reliable information. It leads to a high level of consistently effective teaching and some innovative and distinctive practice.

You and the staff exhibit a strong sense of values, which you pass on to the pupils well. The academy is a diverse and, as a result of your efforts, harmonious community. I found the pupils to be very friendly, engaging, well-mannered and dignified young people. You inculcate in the pupils a good sense of curiosity about the world around them and positive attitudes to learning and to life. The academy nurtures self-esteem, mutual respect and self-confidence very effectively. As a result, when combined with their generally above-average attainment by the end of Key Stage 2, the pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education by the time that they leave Whitemoor.

The impact of the academy's guiding principles, 'Dare to be different' and 'Take care', is evident in the ways in which the staff work and also in the pupils' demeanour. Those maxims have a direct influence on the pupils' behaviour and thinking. That is apparent in the ways that they respond in lessons and how they

present themselves to other people, and they talk about how the maxims guide their approach to their classwork and homework.

Some challenges remain. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of the early years is noticeably below average. Despite a healthy increase in 2015, there is not yet a clear trend of improvement. The pupils' attainment by the end of Key Stage 1 has declined in recent years and was well below average in 2015.

Safeguarding is effective.

The 'Take Care' team acts as an effective nodal point for the academy's work to safeguard the pupils. It ensures that potential needs are identified quickly, that cases of high-level needs are managed carefully, and that there is very frequent and purposeful communication throughout the staff.

The nominated leaders and managers work conscientiously with a broad range of outside agencies to ensure that any pupils who need it and their families, where appropriate, receive suitable support. The governing body oversees this work and is as determined as the managers in advocating for the pupils, in order to get appropriate support for them when necessary.

The staff receive updates on safeguarding annually and other training focused on specific issues. This ensures that they are alert to current expectations and national concerns. For example, the most recent update introduced them to the issue of radicalisation and they are to receive further training about the 'Prevent' duty imminently. Members of the governing body participate in the training with the staff.

The pupils told me that they feel very safe at the academy. They told me that bullying of any kind is very rare, including pupils from groups that are potentially at higher risk of being bullied. All of the parents with whom I spoke and a majority of the few who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) confirmed that their children feel safe. The pupils' attendance has improved notably and consistently over the last few years.

Inspection findings

- Your influence as headteacher is evident throughout the academy. The academy reflects your principled approach and deep commitment to providing the pupils with a very positive start in life, in which you succeed. You lead by example and that has resulted in a forward- and outward-looking academy, focused consistently on improving what it does in the best interests of the pupils.
- The academy provides a broad-based, well-balanced and rich curriculum, which supports both the pupils' academic development and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. The wide range of sports, clubs, visits and other such activities adds to the stimulating topics and tasks in lessons.

- Together, these things have a notably positive impact on the pupils' progress, attitudes, behaviour and attendance. It was apparent from my discussions with the pupils how many of their experiences spark their enthusiasm, from physical education (a subject given some prominence at the academy), to science experiments, art lessons, and a host of other subjects and topics.
- For example, the pupils' attendance has improved well in recent years and is now above average. The changes that you have made to the curriculum, in order to make Whitemoor a place that the pupils want to be, in conjunction with the greater priority that you have given to promoting attendance, exemplify your well-rounded and effective approach to improving the academy. You blend elements of the curriculum very subtly with innovative approaches to encouraging good behaviour. For example, the 'Take Care Club' offers pupils six challenges, designed to develop their social skills and to help them to learn good manners. For one of the challenges, a group of pupils was taken on a visit to a local supermarket and each given a pound to spend, the challenge being to use good manners when finding what they wanted and making the purchase. Completion of all six challenges makes a pupil eligible to act as an academy ambassador; a role which I found the pupils took seriously when greeting me in classrooms.
- The pupils behave very well. Misbehaviour is uncommon and, when it occurs, is predominantly of the type requiring only the academy's lowest level of sanctions, which, the pupils told me, works well.
- The pupils described to me in detail how the academy's behaviour management system works. The system has been designed cleverly, so that it results in the pupils taking responsibility for their actions; and they know and understand this.
- The pupils show justifiable pride in themselves and in their academy. That pride was illustrated, for example, in conversations that I had with them, when I asked if they ever heard racist language being used in the academy; 'No way!' was one typically vigorous response.
- The Year 6 pupils with whom I spoke expressed well-balanced views about their forthcoming move to secondary school. They were appropriately confident about the prospect and, equally appropriately, slightly uncertain, in part because their experience at Whitemoor has been such that they are understandably a little reluctant to leave.
- You have developed a distinctive approach to planning teaching and assessment, which is used by the teachers with an impressive degree of consistency. The approach has a marked impact on the pupils' positive attitudes and approaches to learning, their commitment to the tasks in lessons, and their understanding of their own learning. It gives them some sense of control over their learning, which results in high levels of motivation and an ambition to improve themselves.
- The approach works well for each ability level. It provides meaningful opportunities for the most able to reach the standards of which they are capable, while simultaneously enabling pupils with special educational needs and disability to undertake the same work at an equally appropriate level.

- This approach enables the teachers to provide the pupils with feedback and guidance that is focused on particular and precise aspects of learning. That results, in turn, in the pupils having a good understanding of what they are intended to learn.
- The teaching captures the interest of the pupils in all key stages, so that they concentrate in lessons and want to do well. The work in their books shows secure gains over time in their writing and in their knowledge and understanding of mathematics.
- The early years leaders analyse assessment information in detail. They have a clear view of the progress made by individual children and by different groups. The staff's assessments are accurate.
- I note that a higher proportion of the children enter the early years with levels of development that are well below those found nationally. The fact that the children are closer to average by the time that they enter Key Stage 1 shows that, generally, they make good progress.
- Nevertheless, the fact that scores in the Year 1 phonics check are consistently below average shows that the children are not as prepared to benefit from Key Stage 1 as they should be.
- You have embarked already on a well-reasoned revised approach to using assessment in the early years, which has the potential to improve the transition to Key Stage 1. The changes have resulted in a strong focus on assessing the children's learning needs from a very early stage, so that the teaching begins work quickly on meeting those needs. The revised approach has not yet been sustained for long enough to have demonstrated the impact intended.
- The shortfalls in learning by the end of the early years affect the rates of progress and levels of attainment adversely for some groups during Key Stage 1 and subsequently.
- The different groups of pupils represented at the academy make similar rates of progress overall, but some differences remain, including for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and disability.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the revised approach to assessment in the early years is sustained and developed, in order to improve the children's readiness for Key Stage 1
- the remaining differences in the rates of progress made by groups of pupils are reduced further, so that the recent decline in attainment at Key Stage 1 is arrested and reversed.

Yours sincerely

Clive Moss
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with the headteacher and the senior leadership team, representatives of the governing body, the designated persons responsible for safeguarding and the family support worker, and with leaders responsible for the early years and for Key Stage 1. I made a series of visits to lessons jointly with the headteacher. I examined examples of the pupils' work and looked at the teachers' assessments of that work. I held a range of discussions with a wide variety of pupils, informally when observing breaktimes and during lessons, and formally with a group of pupils. I observed the pupils' behaviour around the academy at the start of the day, at breaktimes, and during lessons. I met with parents at the beginning of the school day, looked at the views of parents posted on Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and other comments from parents collected by the academy. I examined a range of documents, including safeguarding records and policies, behaviour policies, the latest achievement information for the academy, including the academy's data, the academy's improvement plan, and records relating to the pupils' behaviour.