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Mrs Yvonne Fearn
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Fearn

Short inspection of Victoria Community School

Following my visit to the school on 14 March 2017 with Sarah Ashley, 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 September 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, your leadership team, governors and staff are committed to creating a highly inclusive school at the heart of the local community. Together with parents and pupils, you have created a warm ethos where pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are welcomed from the local community and beyond. Consequently, pupils, from their different starting points, continue to experience a good standard of education, are happy, and look forward to coming to school.

Since the last inspection, you have improved the quality of teachers' questioning within lessons, especially that of the younger children in school. Children's earlier entry into school and the subsequent focus on developing their language skills is impacting positively on children's outcomes in the nursery. This, in turn, is leading to improved levels of development in reading at the end of Reception. This can be seen most clearly in guided reading, which is being used effectively throughout the school and is having a positive impact on pupils' outcomes. Teachers are using challenging texts to allow pupils to practise and develop their reading skills more quickly. As a result, current pupils are making better progress in reading than in writing and mathematics. As one pupil said, 'I never used to like reading, but I like it now because the books we read are very interesting.' You have correctly recognised that pupils' progress in writing is a key area of development for the school and have appropriate plans in place to address this urgently.

Parents are positive about the school's work. They believe that their children are taught well and say that their children enjoy coming to school; the majority would recommend the school to others. One parent, through Parent View, summarised the thoughts of the majority of parents, writing: 'I am happy with my child's progress and achievements at school. Children are regularly encouraged to challenge themselves and are rewarded for their efforts by means of star of the week, reader of the week, mathematician of the week, attendance awards. I find the school warm and welcoming and approachable'.

Another parent said, 'I am very proud to send my children to this school where the teaching and management environment is supportive, encouraging and challenging.'

Pupils are polite and well mannered. They are confident and proud of their school. Conduct around the school is generally good. The recent marked increase in the number of families in the area has meant the number of pupils in the school has increased considerably. This has resulted in the need to integrate large groups of new pupils into established year groups. This has been a significant challenge for you and governors to manage. You have taken the decision to manage future growth gradually through early years to prevent growth negatively affecting the progress of current pupils.

Governors offer an effective balance of support and challenge to you and to your leadership team. They are strategic in their approach and have a very clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Governors are regular visitors to the school, and offer a range of useful expertise. They monitor safeguarding and special educational needs effectively. Their regular meetings with leaders about these areas, which are reported back to the full governing body, have challenged the school to ensure that its provision is effective in these areas.

Safeguarding is effective.

All statutory requirements for keeping pupils safe are met. Training in this area is up to date and you ensure that all staff have up-to-date knowledge of what is required of them. The recording of concerns about pupils shows that staff are vigilant in reporting these. Concerns are followed up rigorously and all actions taken are recorded accurately. The school uses the local authority effectively when cases need escalating. As a result, the school's systems are effective at ensuring that families receive strong support when it is needed.

Pupils say they feel safe at school and that they are well cared for. Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe at school, at home, and when on the internet.

Inspection findings

- You and your leadership team have a clear overview of the school's performance. You use pupils' assessment information to quickly identify those pupils who are at

risk of underachieving. Meetings about pupils' progress ensure that teachers are held to account for the rate of improvement of the pupils they teach.

- Children enter the school with skills significantly below those of their peers nationally. Your investment of resources in developing their language and literacy skills in the early years, coupled with developing an early start in the first term of their third birthday, ensures that they make clear progress in their social and academic skills.
- Progress in writing is slowed by too few opportunities for older pupils to compose their own extended pieces of writing and to challenge themselves to write at greater length. In some lessons teachers set a framework that is intended to support pupils' writing by giving it a structure, but this sometimes has the opposite effect and prevents them from extending their ideas.
- The proportion of pupils who passed the Year 1 phonics check in 2016 showed an improving picture over time, and is now at the national average. The pupils identified as being at the early stages of reading and needing additional support are secure in knowing their initial sounds and in reading simple words. They are being helped to develop their skills in blending sounds to read more difficult words.
- You have highlighted the use of pupil premium funding as a focus for school improvement. The school subsidises experiences for disadvantaged pupils through extra-curricular visits and a range of other actions. Leaders regularly measure the impact of pupil premium by using the school's assessment system. This tracking of pupil progress clearly shows that these interventions result in the improved progress of disadvantaged pupils in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is very well led by the deputy headteacher, who meets with teachers each term to agree interventions. The deputy headteacher has developed a provision map to track the effectiveness of all additional support and materials. It is reviewed at least termly.
- The school runs an additional resource provision. All staff working in this provision are well trained in supporting pupils with speech and language difficulties. Where progress allows, pupils return to mainstream schooling.
- Teaching assistants are deployed strategically and make a real difference to the learning experience of pupils. Teachers plan lessons that take into account the needs of those pupils who need extra support. This all contributes to the very good progress pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make at the school.
- Boys did not attain as well in reading as they did in writing and mathematics and in 2016 they did not attain the national standard. Current progress from Reception to Year 4 in writing from very low starting points is not fast enough and there is a significant gap between the progress made by boys and that made by girls. Evidence collected during the inspection indicates boys' progress by Year 6 in reading is significantly lower than that of girls but the school has closed the gap and differences in attainment are now much smaller. This indicates boys have made accelerated progress in reading.

- Attendance is monitored regularly. Leaders identify what the barriers are to irregular attendance and provide families with focused support.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- a strategic plan for the growth of the school is developed with the local authority to ensure that current pupils' progress is not affected by the rapid increase in the number of pupils in key stage 2
- boys' progress in writing is accelerated so that it matches that seen in reading and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Max Vlahakis
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, the team inspector and I met with you, your deputy headteacher and two governors, including the chair of the governing body. We spoke informally to pupils in the playground and in lessons, and to parents as they brought their children in to school. I looked at the 18 responses to the Parent View survey. We visited lessons together. I looked at the work in a selection of pupils' books. I considered the school's self-evaluation and its plans for development. I took into account pupils' standards of attainment and rates of progress. I reviewed a range of school policies, including those for safeguarding and child protection.