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Miss Sharron Philpot
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Miss Philpot

Short inspection of Devonshire Junior Academy

Following my visit to the school on 23 May 2017, 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 November 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and the head of school provide strong and highly effective leadership that have strengthened the quality of teaching and brought about significant improvements to the school.

Leaders, staff and governors successfully promote the school's core values, 'Together we learn – Together we grow – Together we achieve'. High-quality displays of pupils' art work, independent writing, history, geography and science projects confirm that pupils make good progress. Pupils themselves confirmed to me that they thoroughly enjoy being at school and how much the staff and governors value their work and efforts. Pupils' work and displays demonstrate very clearly the many significant improvements to the curriculum since the previous inspection in 2013. You are right to describe the school's curriculum as 'real, immersive and innovative'. Pupils experience a broad and stimulating range of activities, visits and high-quality learning activities linked to themes and projects. In addition, pupils use and apply their mathematics skills very well, resulting in outcomes and achievements that compare favourably with national figures. This too is a key improvement since the previous inspection and is a result of strong leadership and teaching of mathematics.

Your school provides expert additional provision for some pupils with autism. Furthermore, pupils across the school who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make exceptional progress. The oversight and management of special

educational needs provision is first class. The coordinator who manages this shares her considerable expertise and makes sure that staff are well trained to teach and monitor the intervention programmes planned for pupils who have additional needs, including learning, physical, mental or social and emotional needs.

Teachers and support staff have received some well-devised training, support and other professional development. As a result, teachers set high expectations for work and behaviour in lessons and learning support practitioners provide consistently effective support in lessons. Increasingly, you and your staff share best practice across the school and with other partner schools in the multi-academy trust (MAT). However, some teaching does not provide enough challenge, particularly for the most able pupils. This slows the progress of those pupils who have the potential to reach high standards in reading and writing which means that they do not acquire the necessary reading and comprehension skills at greater depth. As you and the head of school know, when we looked at some of the work in pupils' books and observed parts of lessons, the questions posed by teachers do not always extend pupils' learning or probe their understanding enough to enable them to think harder and deepen their learning.

It was a delight to hear a group of Year 5 and Year 6 pupils read aloud when I met the group to discuss their reading and attitudes to school and learning. It was also helpful to meet some of the representatives of the school council to discuss their views about school and why they feel safe in school. During the course of the inspection day I found that pupils are confident, articulate and have extremely positive attitudes to school and learning. These personal characteristics are consistent across the school. Your pupils are extremely well behaved, polite and courteous. They are a credit to their families and your staff, and the school makes a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

In addition to the progress made by the group of pupils I met for the reading session, assessment information, previous test results and current progress measures show that pupils make good progress in reading and writing. I agree with your leaders and staff that there is now scope to build on this by helping pupils to experience a broader range of books, texts, genres and authors. As we discussed, some pupils, and particularly disadvantaged pupils, lack the vocabulary to understand fully the text they are reading. Teachers are making good progress in extending pupils' vocabulary, as we saw during lessons when pupils were reading aloud, dictating texts and sharing ideas about words and phrases. Leaders and staff have adapted and refined the way guided reading lessons are organised so that pupils read and write more extensively and independently. However, some of the writing in pupils' books shows repeated spelling and punctuation errors because staff are not intervening enough while pupils write to correct these misunderstandings or mistakes. In addition, when pupils come across unfamiliar words when reading they do not always have access to dictionaries or thesauruses to check meanings or to find alternative expressions for different words and phrases. I tested this with the group of pupils I met to discuss their reading habits. The pupils were very keen to know the meaning of some unusual or unfamiliar words and phrases. There is clearly potential to explore this further by extending

pupils' vocabulary and understanding through the use of word banks, dictionaries and the many real-life experiences the curriculum offers pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are robust and there is a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the school. Leaders and staff are vigilant and very effective in ensuring that pupils are safe. One of the core strengths of the school is the attention that leaders, staff and governors give to pupils' welfare, care and safety. This was endorsed by the views of many parents and as one group of pupils stated, 'We feel very safe in school because our teachers and all adults really care about us.' Pupils are right. Leaders, staff and governors value pupils' work and contributions to the life of the school and to the wider community.

Staff vetting procedures include systematic checks on visitors, volunteers, governors and supply staff. The indoor and outdoor areas, including an excellent range of stimulating resources and areas available for outdoor play and indoor physical education, are clean, safe and secure. You have ensured that e-safety is a high priority. Pupils know what to do to keep themselves safe when using the internet or mobile devices. You and the governors make sure that staff are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities by making sure that safeguarding and child protection training is carried out systematically. As you know, I checked the school's attendance procedures and the measures you and your staff adopt to deal with irregular attendance or persistent absenteeism. You and the MAT's welfare officer support leaders and staff to monitor attendance. The welfare officer works closely with vulnerable and disadvantaged families in particular. The vast majority of pupils attend school regularly and on time and current attendance rates are above national figures. The staff go the extra mile to make sure that pupils are safe. The welfare officer and leaders carry out home visits and regularly keep in touch with families. The vast majority of parents believe, and rightly so, that pupils are safe and secure in school.

Inspection findings

- As you know, I shared my initial lines of enquiry with you and the head of school in order to check which areas of the school's work are strong and which may need further improvement, refinement or development. Assessments show that disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as other pupils who are not disadvantaged. In mathematics, last years' national test results show that disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 made outstanding progress in relation to their starting points.
- I also checked the achievement of the most able pupils who joined the school in Year 3 with levels of attainment that were above age-related standards. We visited classes and looked in some books and it is clear that the large majority of these pupils reach or exceed age-related standards in reading, writing and mathematics. However, assessments show that there is potential for even more pupils to exceed age-related standards in reading and writing. I agree with you and the staff that what you term 'booster interventions' are working well and increasingly more pupils are catching up quickly if they struggle with some

aspects of their learning. As you described very clearly, these short bursts of support every afternoon focus on what you called 'bits of learning' that pupils struggled with in the morning. The afternoon 'boost' is helping to identify misunderstandings and concepts which pupils struggle with, to help them catch up.

- I checked to see if attendance rates are improving and particularly whether persistent absence is reducing. The meeting with the MAT's education welfare officer and the information provided by you and the officer shows that current rates of attendance are above last year's national average. In addition, persistent absence rates are now below national figures. I also spoke to many pupils during the day and they told me that they love school and they feel safe because they are able to make and keep strong friendships.
- I can see why your pupils love school so much. This is a successful and inclusive school which embraces diversity and a respect for all children and families, whatever their backgrounds, cultures or circumstances. All the parents I spoke to were very pleased with the quality of education and high levels of care and attention you and your staff provide for their children. British values of tolerance, acceptance and democracy are embedded throughout the curriculum and what you term 'the real life experiences' pupils have at the school. At the time of the inspection Year 6 pupils visited a local Hindu temple in the morning. When they returned some of them told me how much they really enjoyed the experience and all the pupils in the group I spoke to were very knowledgeable about the world's major religions, faiths and customs. One pupil told me, 'The temple was beautiful and peaceful, and that is what I will always remember.'
- A great deal has been achieved since the previous inspection to raise standards in reading and writing. The pupils in Years 3 and 4 use their good phonics skills and knowledge to tackle unfamiliar words. Assessments show that the most able pupils, including those that are disadvantaged, achieve well, although there is scope now to increase the proportion of pupils exceeding age-related standards in reading and writing.
- Effective support and intervention work enables pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to achieve exceptionally well. There is strong management and oversight of provision, including that for the pupils admitted to the school's additional autism provision.
- Leaders and staff have adapted and reshaped the curriculum in order that you focus very strongly on one of your core values, 'To provide a school that is fully inclusive and that values every child as unique.' The most significant improvement since the previous inspection is the higher standard of work that pupils produce in every subject of the national curriculum. As you recall, this was highlighted as an area for improvement at the time of the previous inspection. Pupils are energised by the range of work, visits, topics and enrichment experiences you and the staff provide. The high-quality display of a sculpture of poppies produced by pupils working with a professional artist commemorating Remembrance Day clearly symbolises the way pupils experience and study a range of stimulating and thought-provoking topics. The sculpture represents the

work pupils studied on the topic of 'fallen heroes' in the World Wars, and clearly symbolises the school's commitment to teaching British values.

- Outstanding improvements to the curriculum include what you rightly describe as 'real life' experiences that are set out as themes and projects. For example, pupils in Year 3 designed a 'nature trail' to be built in a local park, enabling pupils to contribute towards improving the local environment and community. Year 6 pupils produced and printed a book of high quality about the topic of 'evolution'. Pupils could explain the many scientific principles and theories about mankind's evolution since pre-historic times to modern day. Year 4 pupils produced a stimulating booklet entitled 'Tip of the iceberg' which included accounts of the sinking of the Titanic as well as puzzles and interesting topics describing scientific research and theories about the contentious subject of climate change. Year 4 pupils made a video blog about 'The Ruthless Romans', describing what they learned in their history topic about the invasion of Britain by the Roman Empire. Pupils produce a termly magazine, 'Curriculum News', which includes a wealth of information for parents and the local community about school topics and activities, including the many and varied before and after-school clubs and sports events that take place. Parents and pupils explained to me how much they look forward to the information provided by pupils about their work and experiences in school. 'I really found that topic [evolution and DNA] fascinating,' stated one pupil in Year 6 and she went on to tell me that this had sparked her and her classmates' enthusiasm for science, 'Especially now that we will be doing more advanced science in secondary school next year!'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- Continue focusing on raising pupils' achievement in reading so that even more pupils reach or exceed the age-related standard by the end of each of the four year groups (Year 3 through to Year 6).
- Build on the good and strong practice that exists across the school by:
 - making sure that teachers ask more challenging questions during class or group discussions with pupils
 - checking pupils' independent writing more diligently while they write to help them avoid repeating the same spelling and punctuation errors.

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

Yours sincerely

Charalambos Loizou
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and the head of school throughout the day's inspection. Together with the head of school you and I observed parts of some lessons, spoke to pupils and checked some of their work in books. I also met with the chair of the governing body and a further two governors. I also met with the chief executive of the Victoria Academies Trust, which is the multi-academy trust (MAT) responsible for the management and oversight of Devonshire Junior Academy and five other academies. I also met two members of staff, the coordinator for special educational needs and a representative of the MAT who is responsible for monitoring pupils' attendance and welfare. We visited classes together to observe some teaching, looked at pupils' work in books and spoke to pupils during lessons. I also spoke to pupils during lunchtime and was delighted to meet six pupils who are members of the school council and a group of pupils to hear them read. The discussions with pupils helped me to gather their views about the school, their work and progress and to consider why they feel safe and happy in school. I spoke to some parents at the start of the school day and considered their views. There were too few responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, to analyse. I scrutinised the school's development plan, monitoring files and leaders' self-review of its work and effectiveness. We discussed assessments of pupils' achievement and progress. I checked staff vetting and safeguarding procedures to determine whether the school's arrangements for safeguarding are effective.