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3 July 2017

Mrs Caroline Jobling
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Jobling

Short inspection of Featherstone Academy

Following my visit to the school on 20 June 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 the school was judged to be good in February 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 senior team and governors lead a school in which pupils are happy and keen to learn. Your leadership team, including your recently promoted deputy and assistant headteachers, supports you well and shows a determination to bring about further improvement. You have high expectations of staff and these, in turn, are passed on to the pupils. All staff who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire are proud to be part of Featherstone Academy. They agree that the school has a culture that is aspirational for all pupils, and is well led and managed. The great majority of parents speak positively about the school. They comment on the progress that their children are making and the high level of support provided by the staff, especially for children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. As one parent wrote, 'My children are really happy at school and wake up each day excited to go and learn.'

In 2014, the school converted to academy status, joining a multi-academy trust. Although you and your governors did not initially feel that the school benefited from membership, you now increasingly value the support that you receive from the trust. This includes a range of additional opportunities that are available to staff and pupils in order to further improve the quality of teaching, the curriculum and pupils' outcomes.

Your curriculum is broad and rich, and is adapted to reflect pupils' interests. This is most obvious in your pre-school setting, where staff 'plan in the moment'. For

example, staff responded to children talking about going on holiday by setting up sand and water areas, a make-believe train and the chance to make a postcard. In Year 4, pupils are learning about India following a talk from a parent and a class visit to a Sikh temple, activities that sparked their interest in the country. Your approach to the curriculum gives pupils many opportunities to develop their reading and writing skills across a range of subjects. However, they currently have fewer opportunities to apply their mathematical skills, such as problem-solving and reasoning, across the curriculum. There is also more to be done to ensure that your most-able pupils have opportunities to develop knowledge and skills at a higher level across a wide range of subjects.

You have addressed many of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection, for example by improving questioning and helping pupils know what they need to do next to improve their work. However, due to the appointment of a number of new staff, you are aware of the ongoing need to share effective practice and ensure that there is consistency of teaching between classes. This therefore remains an area for further development.

During the inspection, all pupils, from Year 1 to Year 6, took part in the school's annual sports day. The event was well organised and included a high level of pupil involvement and engagement. Pupils completed a series of activities, each of which allowed them to achieve success, regardless of their age. The pupils I spoke to were thoroughly enjoying themselves and pupils' behaviour was of a high standard throughout the day. The event was well supported by pupils' families.

Pupils talk enthusiastically about the school and they appreciate the help and support that they receive from their teachers. Older pupils enjoy taking on responsibilities such as those of head boy and girl or their deputies, helping younger pupils with their reading and being school council representatives. The school council has written pupil versions of the school's behaviour, attendance and anti-bullying policies. These take a strong line on the importance of good behaviour and coming to school. Pupils report that behaviour has improved since their policy was introduced and speak about systems being fair and used consistently. You and your leadership team agree that this is the case.

Safeguarding is effective.

Keeping children safe is at the heart of your work. You have created a team which ensures that the school is a safe environment for pupils and that they are well cared for at all times. Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and that they are taught to stay safe, for example when using the internet.

All staff have regular training to understand their responsibilities for keeping pupils safe. Staff are clear about what they should do if they have any concerns. You work with external agencies as necessary and you are persistent when concerned about a pupil's welfare. You have a good understanding of the specific safeguarding concerns that relate to the context of the school. Governors understand their role in overseeing the effectiveness of safeguarding and regularly monitor the effectiveness

of school procedures.

Inspection findings

- Over the last year, you have introduced a new approach to assessment and tracking pupils' progress. This, along with staff training and in-class support, has raised everyone's expectations and brought about a greater focus on ensuring that all pupils make good progress. The great majority of pupils in school are working at the standard expected for their age. The accuracy of your assessment system is checked when teachers within the school, the multi-academy trust and local schools meet to compare outcomes and standards. Evidence seen during the inspection supports your judgements.
- Increasingly, you are addressing the needs of all your pupils, including the most able, through effective planning in which teachers ensure that activities are suitably challenging. Reading and writing skills are developed across the curriculum and standards of presentation are generally high. Leaders are aware that there are sometimes inconsistencies between classes and are taking action to address these.
- You and your team provide effective support for pupils eligible for pupil premium funding. These pupils' needs are addressed in a variety of ways, including targeted support to rapidly address any misunderstandings or gaps in knowledge. All pupils eligible for pupil premium are heard to read in school on a daily basis. You encourage attendance at extra-curricular clubs and respond positively to pupils' requests for specific activities whenever possible. You also provide support for pupils' social and emotional needs. As a result, almost all disadvantaged pupils, including those who are most able, are making good progress. The differences in outcomes between them and other pupils across the country are reducing. As with other pupils in school, the majority are working at the standards expected for their age, and some at the higher standards.
- Over the last year, you and your team have introduced a number of approaches to support the progress of your most-able pupils, especially in mathematics. These include an online mathematics programme aimed at older pupils and a Year 1 project aimed specifically at girls. Both of these projects have not only developed pupils' mathematics skills, but have also improved their confidence in tackling mathematics problems. More generally in mathematics, pupils can often choose the task that they wish to complete from a range of increasingly difficult options. Pupils explain that they like this approach and the challenge it brings. As one pupil said, 'most pupils push themselves'.
- You and your team provide pupils with a wide range of experiences in order to help raise their aspirations. For example, groups of gifted and talented pupils have recently visited the science museum, while others have visited art galleries or have been involved in a performing arts project with schools from across the multi-academy trust. The high expectations of staff are enabling more pupils to work at greater depth and achieve higher standards. Further developing these opportunities remains a priority for the school.
- In 2016, pupils' attendance was in line with the national average. However,

attendance for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities was in the lowest 10% nationally. Attendance information for this school year shows that while current attendance has dropped slightly, attendance for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is improving. The actions you take, such as rewards for pupils and classes with high attendance, letters to all parents about their child's attendance and working with targeted families, are raising the importance of good attendance within the community. The procedures you and your staff follow, including contacting parents on the first day of absence, help to ensure that pupils are safe and not at risk of going missing from education. You are aware of the need to maintain your focus on improving attendance.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- effective practice in school is shared so that there is greater consistency in teaching in order to meet the needs of all pupils, especially the most able
- the curriculum continues to develop so that pupils have opportunities to reason, develop their problem-solving skills and work at greater depth across a wide range of subjects.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local 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

Catherine Crooks
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you; your senior leadership team; members of staff; eight governors, including the chair and vice-chair of governors; the school's attendance consultant; and the director of primary academies for Education Central Multi-Academy Trust. I talked with parents at the start of the day and with pupils both formally and informally.

I observed teaching and learning in the early years and I observed all pupils from Years 1 to 6 as they took part in sports day events. I looked at samples of pupils' work in books and on display in classrooms across the school. I observed pupils' behaviour throughout the day. I scrutinised several documents, including your school self-evaluation, your most recent headteacher report to the local area board and documents relating to safeguarding.

I took account of 68 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire,

including 14 comments received electronically. I also took account of 15 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and 13 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire.