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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Susan Stell
Headteacher
St Margaret's Academy
Barewell Road
Torquay
Devon
TQ1 4PA

Dear Mrs Stell

Short inspection of St Margaret's Academy

Following my visit to the school on 21 September 2017 with Sarah Mascall, HMI, 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 May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. There have been considerable staffing changes. You took up the post of headteacher in 2015. Subsequently, you appointed senior leaders who have specific skills and expertise to attend to the areas you identified as priorities for improvement.

Relationships between parents and the school are good. The local authority hold the school in high regard for its success in supporting pupils who have struggled in other schools. The majority of parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school's work and value the approachability of staff. One parent comment representative of many stated that, 'The school has a happy, caring and supportive environment. Children are kind, courteous and respectful.'

You have successfully dealt with the areas raised at the previous inspection. Your expectations are aspirational. In 2017, outcomes exceeded those nationally at key stage 2. At key stage 1, more pupils achieved the standards expected for their age than previously. You were asked to make sure that work provides more challenge for higher-ability pupils. In 2017, outcomes for those achieving the highest standards were above last year's national average in key stages 1 and 2. Outcomes for current pupils are equally positive. In addition, leaders were asked to provide governors with more detail about the school's performance. You and your leadership team now provide governors with detailed information about improvement work. However, governors tend to rely too heavily on this information.

As a result, they do not hold leaders to account with sufficient rigour. They have been slow to respond to training and local authority audits. However, recently governors are being proactive in considering partnerships to ensure the sustainability of the school's success.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your staff team take your responsibilities for safeguarding seriously. Appropriate checks are in place to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children. Furthermore, the school's culture of safeguarding is strong. Pupils and parents trust leaders and openly share details when they are facing challenging circumstances. Pupils report that they feel safe. They speak knowledgeably about how to keep safe, including when using social media.

Staff know and understand what they should do if they have concerns about pupils. They follow up issues in a timely manner to ensure that no pupil comes to harm. You are assiduous in working with external agencies to ensure that vulnerable pupils and their families receive the support they need. You have found the local authority's response to be improving. However, there are occasions when the response from children's services is unhelpfully slow.

Your actions to improve pupils' attendance have been successful. Overall attendance of pupils is now above the national average. The number of pupils who are persistently absent from school has also reduced and is now in line with the national average. However, there are still too many disadvantaged pupils who are persistently absent from school. There are encouraging signs of improvements. However, governors do not keep close checks or evaluate the effectiveness of your actions. Although governors have received training, they recognise that increased vigilance in checking the school's work is needed.

Inspection findings

- First, I focused on the effectiveness of leadership at all levels to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. You have fostered a culture where leaders and staff reflect on what works well and what could be improved further. Your action plans clearly demonstrate a relentless focus on improving standards. Procedures for checking the quality of the school's work are comprehensive and thorough. You and your team have been tenacious in ensuring that teachers' assessment strategies are accurate. Consequently, teachers plan activities effectively and give pupils clear guidance about how to improve. This work has led to much improved academic standards for pupils across the school. However, you have recognised the need for more rigorous monitoring by school governors to ensure that standards continue to improve.
- Next, I considered the effectiveness of leaders to raise standards in key stage 1, in particular to support the most able pupils. Too few pupils reached the highest standards in 2016. More aspirational target setting and changes to teachers' planning have helped to raise expectations. Your discussions with teachers focus on the progress of all groups of pupils and have led to improvements. In

addition, interventions such as after-school clubs have paid dividends. More pupils reached the highest standards (greater depth) than those nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. Work in pupils' books so far this term shows that pupils have sustained the high standards expected of them.

- My third line of enquiry explored the effectiveness of leaders' actions to support pupils who are disadvantaged and those who have special needs and/or disabilities. Too few disadvantaged pupils made the progress they should in the 2016 end of key stage 1 assessments. You have been highly successful in tackling this issue. In 2017, disadvantaged pupils made accelerated progress to reach standards above others nationally in several areas. In most year groups, disadvantaged pupils are making at least as good and often better progress than their peers. Work has been particularly effective in the early years. Finely tuned teaching has helped children to catch up quickly so that they are ready for Year 1. Leaders are not complacent and recognise that there is still more work to be done.
- An increasing proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making accelerated progress to achieve expected standards. This work is most evident in key stage 2. You have rightly identified the need for improvements in supporting pupils in key stage 1 who have special educational needs and/or disabilities so that smaller steps of success can be recognised. Few of these pupils currently make accelerated progress. Your team has identified a new approach to the assessment and support of these pupils' needs and plans are in place to implement new strategies.
- The school hosts a centre for the hearing impaired, with a specialist teacher providing support for pupils in school and staff training, as well as carrying out outreach work in other schools. Additional services, such as speech and language therapy, support staff in meeting pupils' needs. Consequently, pupils with hearing impairment make good progress. They are happy and settled in school.
- Finally, I focused on the effectiveness of science teaching. Outcomes in 2016 were below the national average for key stage 1. You recognise that the school was slow to understand the expectations of the 2014 national curriculum. Staff training has rectified this. As with English and mathematics, outcomes in science are better than the national average this year. Work in books reflects pupils' gains in understanding scientific concepts.

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

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the attendance of groups of pupils is checked regularly and swift action is taken to ensure that all pupils receive their full entitlement to school
- pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities in key stage 1 receive the support they need to make accelerated progress

- governors monitor the school's work with greater rigour to ensure that standards continue to improve.

Yours sincerely

Tracy Hannon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, we spoke with you and your senior leaders, pupils and parents. I also had a telephone conversation with a local authority representative and a member of the governing body.

We made visits to lessons to observe pupils' attitudes to learning. We also scrutinised the work in pupils' topic books.

I considered a range of documentary evidence, which included the school's self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, current progress information, minutes of the governing body meetings and pupil attendance information. I also considered staff employment files, safeguarding referrals and child protection records.

In addition, I took account of 73 responses to the Parent View online survey and 18 responses to the staff survey issued during the inspection.