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Mrs Alison Parr  
Principal  
Blackfriars Academy  
Priory Road  
Newcastle-under-Lyme  
Staffordshire  
ST5 2TF

Dear Mrs Parr

### **Short inspection of Blackfriars Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 26 September 2017 with Ofsted Inspector Elizabeth Ellis-Martin, 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 outstanding in January 2013.

### **This school continues to be outstanding.**

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You and leaders within the school and trust are having a striking impact on the lives of the pupils who attend both school sites. Leaders have considerable drive and passion. Pupils' needs are at the heart of decision-making. Outcomes at every key stage are consistently strong. Parents are highly supportive of your work and pupils flourish as a result of your care.

Since the last inspection, the school has joined the Shaw Education Trust. Blackfriars was one of the first schools in the trust. The school has continued to develop and benefits from the support of a team of expert practitioners.

Leaders and governors have a very clear understanding of the school's overall effectiveness. Consistently high performance is underpinned by a rigorous approach to staff development. Staff attend a wide range of training events and are encouraged to undertake their own learning. Many staff gain additional qualifications and explore a range of research areas.

The vision and values of the school are well established. At the Newcastle site, staff and pupils follow values set out through the acronym 'PRIDE'. Values include the 'determination to succeed' and the 'enjoyment of learning and life'. These principles

are evident in learning throughout the school.

A philosophy of determination and learning is equally evident at the Bucknall site. Students at the post-16 provision enjoy excellent relationships, are highly engaged and achieve strong outcomes from their different starting points.

The school's work is overseen by an academy council and board of trustees. The academy council comprises a group of experienced professionals. Councillors meet to hold leaders to account for outcomes and assess the school's overall effectiveness. Minutes of council meetings evidence the extent to which they routinely challenge leaders. There is a clear emphasis on striving to meet the individual needs of every pupil.

Parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and those who submitted additional comments are highly supportive of the school. Every parent who responded online said that they feel pupils are happy and safe in school. All respondents would recommend the school to another parent. One parent commented: 'Staff are caring and nurturing while trying to promote the independence of the child.' Another parent, whose child had just joined the school, stated: 'Absolutely amazing so far, never seen my child happier. Fabulous communication, great transition.' These views are typical of other parental comments received during the inspection.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders have created a culture of safeguarding at Blackfriars. Staff are aware of their duties and responsibilities. Those that I spoke to are fully aware of important learning points from training and know the potential signs of different forms of abuse. Systems for recording and acting upon concerns are fit for purpose.

You are providing opportunities for parents to attend workshops on e-safety. Messages about safety, including the National Society for the Protection of Children's 'PANTS' campaign, are also shared with the community. Child protection records fully demonstrate how staff record concerns and take appropriate action. Every pupil that inspectors spoke to said that they feel safe at school.

### **Inspection findings**

- At the start of the inspection, I met with you and leaders from across the trust to discuss your self-evaluation and development plans. During our discussions, we explored your strengths and areas for development. We devised key lines of enquiry to ascertain the extent to which you are maintaining an outstanding standard of education at Blackfriars. Key lines of enquiry included: how well leaders use self-evaluation to inform improvement plans and the impact of pupil premium funding; the effectiveness of assessment systems and the use of assessment information; and the quality of teachers' questioning within the post-16 provision.
- Every leader involved with the school has an accurate view of its effectiveness. A

wide range of professionals collaborate to ensure that the school is being the best it can be. Performance management systems have developed considerably. Expectations among staff are clear. Any areas for development are swiftly acted upon with appropriate packages of support and guidance. As a result, the school keeps on improving and leaders have a clear handle on any emerging issues.

- You and leaders are soon to meet to make sure that development plans are adapted to take account of your most recent assessment information. This is necessary to ensure that improvements are built upon further and councillors are able to maintain their challenge and support.
- Pupil premium funding is used effectively. A significant proportion of pupils benefit from this additional funding. Councillors track the impact of expenditure through their meetings. The support offered to pupils is based upon their specific needs. This ensures that the school identifies accurately any barriers to learning. Consequently, pupils make substantial and sustained progress.
- You and leaders have devised an assessment system that effectively tracks pupils' achievement. Teachers invest time carefully establishing what pupils can do and what they need to spend more time on. This information is used to inform planning. Sequences of learning are closely matched to pupils' needs and there is a culture of high expectations. However, you recognise that there is more work to be done in this area of school improvement. Changes at a national and local level will require your systems to evolve further so that strong outcomes are maintained.
- The quality of post-16 provision is strong. The Bucknall site is well led and students benefit from the work of many strong practitioners. Students are well supported in the next stage of their learning, training or life. Though teaching is having a very positive impact on outcomes, we agreed that there is scope to strengthen the quality of teachers' questioning further so that there are even more opportunities for students to consider their responses and be challenged.
- The overall quality of teaching across the Newcastle and Bucknall sites is impressive. Staff are receptive and welcoming to visitors. Inspectors observed many examples of creative and engaging practice. This is routine at your school. In one lesson, we observed pupils exploring the sights, sounds and even tastes of a rainforest. Staff supported pupils to explore rain sticks and sample figs. As a result, pupils wanted to learn and were demonstrating their ability to take turns and express their feelings. In another class, pupils were making beefburgers and shortbread. Pupils were able to confidently describe the outcomes of their recipes and were looking forward to taking their food home to share with their families.
- The trust is central to school improvement. There is a collaborative approach to developing all aspects of the school's work. Systems and procedures are rigorous and well thought out. Leaders are relentlessly focused on what is best for the pupils. As a result, the culture of the school is positive and outcomes are strong.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- improvement plans take account of recent assessment information, thereby allowing councillors and trustees to further monitor the impact of leaders' actions
- work continues to refine assessment systems in light of changes and developments at a national and local level so that outcomes are maintained
- the best practice continues to be shared widely so that teachers' questioning offers even more opportunities for students to consider their responses and be challenged.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Keay  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

Inspectors met with you and leaders at the start of the inspection to discuss your self-evaluation and development plans. We used our discussions to devise key lines of enquiry to test out during the inspection. Inspectors observed the arrival of pupils to the Newcastle site and spoke to drivers and escorts.

I met with several parents at the start of the day and reviewed the 20 responses to Parent View and 12 free-text comments. I also took account of 72 responses to the pupil questionnaire and 30 returns from the staff questionnaire.

I met with you and the office manager to review the single central record and personnel files.

Inspectors visited both school sites to conduct learning walks and speak to pupils. Learning walks were conducted jointly with leaders and took account of almost all classes.

I met with your academy council and trust representatives to ascertain the impact of their challenge and support.

Inspectors scrutinised a range of school documentation, including development plans, self-evaluation documents, attendance records, performance management information, child protection records and minutes of meetings from the academy council.