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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Peter Mayland
Headteacher
Albany Academy
Bolton Road
Chorley
Lancashire
PR7 3AY

Dear Mr Mayland

Short inspection of Albany Academy

Following my visit to the school on 26 September 2017 with Mark Burgess, 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 March 2014.

This school continues to be good.

You, with school leaders and governors, have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You display determination in securing continuous improvement and persistence in overcoming underachievement. You have very accurately identified improvement areas and have implemented effective strategies to address them. Staff and governors support these priorities and this has developed a strong team committed to improve. Further, you have ensured that staff and governors understand these improvement priorities and strategies, resulting in a strong team approach. You have made sure that achievement is good for most pupils and weaker areas are improving.

You have created a very safe, happy and purposeful school environment. Behaviour is of a very high standard and pupils are keen to learn. They are respectful, tolerant and welcoming. They enjoy school, feel very safe and appreciate the support that they receive.

Parents have positive views about the school and are supportive of its work. Parents of younger pupils particularly appreciate your efforts to ensure a successful transition from primary school. Parents also value the effective management you and school leaders provide and the quality of support and care their children receive. Many parents fully endorse your successful efforts to create a happy school where their children can 'excel'. An overwhelming number of parents would recommend your school to others.

You have worked with determination and energy to address the recommendations from the previous inspection. You introduced a very comprehensive assessment policy in key stage 3 and teachers consistently apply it. Teachers have a more accurate understanding of pupils' progress and ensure that pupils know what they should do to improve.

Inspectors from the last inspection asked leaders to improve progress in science and drama. You have prioritised these subjects as areas of improvement. You have implemented effective improvement strategies in both areas. As a result, achievement in both these subjects has improved and progress is now good. You currently maintain your scrutiny of these areas to ensure sustained improvement.

You have carefully formalised the way you share good practice across the school. For example, individual faculty reviews include members of other subject teams to help evaluate and spread mutual expertise. School monitoring records show that these initiatives have helped consistently to improve both teaching and progress.

Middle leaders display vigour and confidence in carrying out their roles. They provide valuable support in helping you monitor the quality of teaching and outcomes. Middle leaders focus well on major improvement priorities such as the improvement of the outcomes and attendance of disadvantaged pupils. This reflects the school's team approach. They enthusiastically endorse the collaborative processes you have introduced to share and enhance good practice. Middle leaders make an effective contribution to the school's capacity to improve

You have put into place comprehensive strategies to improve attendance particularly for disadvantaged pupils. You have also identified the need to diminish the difference in achievement between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. These are starting to show impact, but you are very aware that they still require more work.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and school staff work together to successfully create a safe school environment. Staff spoken to articulate their mutual responsibility for keeping children safe. The school keeps information about pupils' safety securely and kept in good order and up to date. A new online management program further strengthens school systems. You have made sure that staff and governors have received relevant safeguarding training in such areas as child protection, female genital mutilation and protection from radicalisation and extremism. You have ensured that the school works well with external agencies and relentlessly secures relevant support.

Pupils say that they are very safe and looked after well at school. Younger pupils feel they received good support in their move from primary school and it helped them to settle in quickly. Pupils appreciate the careful way that school trips are organised to make sure that they are safe. They understand what bullying is and its different forms. Pupils also say that on the few occasions it occurs, teachers

promptly deal with it. You teach pupils to recognise and avoid potential dangers including those online. Parents overwhelmingly believe that you and your staff keep their children safe and well looked after carefully at school.

Inspection findings

- Since the previous inspection, you have successfully strengthened systems to assess pupils' work. This has helped to support the current high expectations and good progress in key stage 3. Work is now more challenging and enables pupils to make good progress. Evidence in pupils' books shows that assessment in key stage 4 is also both consistent and effective.
- Since the last inspection, you have improved the sharing of good practice. Joint planning sessions and formal meetings of the learning and teaching group allows teachers to share effective learning strategies. These innovations are popular with middle leaders and they believe that they have enhanced the quality of learning across the school. School monitoring systems verify their impact.
- Another focus for this inspection was pupils' attendance. Attendance for all pupils and girls and boys is currently above the national average. Attendance for the small number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is good and improving. You have successfully reduced persistent absence for all pupils and for girls. Exclusions, including exclusion of disadvantaged pupils, have declined over time.
- You have made improving the attendance of disadvantaged pupils a high priority. You introduced appropriate systems to address this. These included the appointment of an attendance officer, the use of an attendance panel including parents and increased focus by pastoral leaders. School attendance information, including case studies, indicates that the changes now in place are beginning to show a positive impact. Both the attendance and persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils are improving. However, they remain weaker than national averages and you recognise that they require continued improvement.
- Inspectors focused on outcomes for pupils in key stage 4 to check if you are sustaining or improving them. From their starting points, pupils in 2016 achieved good outcomes in Year 11 for all pupils and pupil groups, except disadvantaged pupils. Comprehensive school assessment information and evidence in pupils' work indicates you have continued this good progress in 2017. You secured good attainment in all subjects except science in 2016. School evidence indicates that you sustained these results in 2017 and improved attainment in science so it is now also good. Standards for both girls and boys and lower-ability pupils remain good. The small number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities attain well, indicating effective use of additional funding.
- Your analysis of data identified the need to focus more on improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. You have appointed a senior manager to coordinate school support and implement appropriate strategies to address the needs of these pupils. School outcomes information for 2017 and work in books indicate these initiatives are starting to have some impact. They show that differences are diminishing across a range of subjects and groups, notably for middle-ability

disadvantaged pupils. In some other subjects and especially for higher- and lower-ability disadvantaged pupils, the differences have fully diminished. However, while there is some improvement, you are aware that differences have not yet fully diminished across the school and improving further the outcomes for disadvantaged pupils remains a high school priority.

- Governors are a strength of the school. They fully understand both what the school does well and what needs further improvement. Governors rigorously monitor the school's work and provide very effective support and challenge to senior leaders. They undertake an extensive range of training, including in areas of safeguarding, to support their work. Governors have a clear view of what areas require further improvement to move the school forward.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers apply school strategies to increase achievement for disadvantaged pupils across the school
- the school builds on emerging improvements in the attendance of disadvantaged pupils so that it increases across the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Merva
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors spoke with you and senior and middle leaders. I also met three representatives of the governing body. We visited a range of lessons and looked at pupils' work in both key stages. We also observed class reading sessions at the start of afternoon school. An inspector met formally pupils from key stage 3 and 4 and we spoke to them informally in lessons. We observed behaviour at the start and end of the school day, in lessons and during the school day.

Inspectors took account of 67 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 52 responses to its free-text facility. An inspector spoke to four parents before school. We also considered feedback from 49 staff and 157 pupils.

Inspectors scrutinised a range of school documentation, including self-evaluation, development planning, use of funding for the pupil premium and the Year 7 catch-up programme, safeguarding, attendance and behaviour. I also considered governing body minutes, a report from the school improvement advisor and a

school evaluation of its quality of teaching and learning.