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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Nick Lowry
Principal
The Co-operative Academy of Stoke-on-Trent
Westport Road
Tunstall
Stoke-on-Trent
ST6 4LD

Dear Mr Lowry

Short inspection of The Co-operative Academy of Stoke-on-Trent

Following my visit to the school on 7 November 2017 with Karen Lockett, 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 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, ably supported by other leaders, staff, governors and the trust, have addressed the areas for improvement from the last full inspection report and taken decisive action to act on the priorities for improvement identified at the time of the monitoring inspection in January 2015. This is an improving school.

Leaders are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and use their thorough analysis of a range of information to take action to improve provision and outcomes for pupils. The impact of these strategies can be clearly seen in the marked advancements in pupils' behaviour, attendance and academic progress, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and safeguarding procedures. Systems have been refined and staffing has been restructured to reflect the high expectations leaders have of themselves, staff and pupils.

The vast majority of pupils make good progress. This is reflected in improved outcomes at the end of key stage 4 in a range of qualifications. Achievement has improved since the last inspection and pupils made faster progress than the national average in 2016 and 2017. Progress was particularly strong in courses that lead to a qualification other than GCSE in 2017.

Current pupils are making good progress in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. Achievement in English has improved markedly since the last

inspection and results in mathematics improved in 2016. However, Year 11 pupils made slower progress in mathematics in 2017. Improving outcomes in mathematics remains a priority for the school.

Disadvantaged pupils are making good progress in most year groups. In 2016, they made similar progress to other pupils at the end of key stage 4 and in 2017, they made faster progress than other pupils nationally. However, their attainment remains lower than that of other pupils.

The leadership of teaching and learning is strong. Detailed analysis of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment leads to focused support and tailored professional development opportunities to help staff improve their practice. Staff value the training that they are given and performance management is used well to address school and individual priorities. There is some very high-quality teaching in the school.

Leaders are aware that not all teaching matches the best that is evident in the school. The most able pupils are not consistently challenged in order to attain at the highest level and, at times, pupils are not given opportunities to explore concepts in depth. However, strong practice is shared and most teaching is at least consistently good.

Teachers take account of the prior learning of pupils in their planning. They provide activities that effectively develop and extend pupils' skills and understanding both in class and through homework tasks. Pupils value the homework that they are set as they find it helps them with their learning in lessons. Teachers routinely set purposeful homework.

Staff use questions well to prompt pupils to recall relevant knowledge and apply their learning to new problems. Where questions are used most effectively, they are targeted to individual pupils to check and deepen their understanding. This helps them take more responsibility for their learning so that they can develop their skills in working independently.

Pupils work well in groups in a positive and productive atmosphere. They are given opportunities to review and discuss their learning and, as a result, they improve their understanding through speaking as well as writing. Pupils are given helpful feedback on a regular basis and they are proud of their work. They behave very well in class.

There have been marked improvements in the standards of behaviour since the last inspection. Pupils who find it difficult to manage their own behaviour are supported well and the use of sanctions, including exclusions, has declined. Leaders are now thoroughly analysing the information that they have about pupils' behaviour and attendance so that appropriate actions can be rapidly implemented. The pastoral team has used this information to secure substantial reductions in the number of behaviour incidents and has taken effective action to improve attendance and diminish persistent absence over the last two years. Pupils want to come to school

and behave well.

The promotion of personal development and welfare is a strength of the school. Pupils are polite and considerate and respect other people. They are well cared for and know who to talk to if they are concerned about anything. They are proud of their school. The school's strong work in this area was recognised by the Department for Education in 2016. The school was regional winner of the Character Award, which celebrates achievements in the promotion of perseverance, resilience, respect and collaboration.

Safeguarding is effective.

All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Governors ensure that safeguarding duties are met. There is a strong culture for keeping pupils safe. Safeguarding is very well led and all staff know that it is their responsibility to keep pupils safe. They have received thorough training and take appropriate action if they have a concern about a pupil's welfare.

Processes are robust and concerns are followed up tenaciously. Referrals are timely and outside agencies are used effectively. Procedures to recruit, select and check staff are thorough and the school's single central record is compliant.

Pupils are taught to stay safe in a range of situations. High-quality work to help pupils protect themselves from grooming and child sexual exploitation has been praised by a senior social worker and is used by the local police as an example of best practice.

Staff have a clear understanding of their 'Prevent' duty and links with the Staffordshire police Prevent Team are strong. This helps to further protect pupils from the risks of radicalisation and extremism.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and managers have taken effective action to improve the school since the last inspection. Senior leadership is strong and middle leadership is developing. Variability in the quality of subject leadership has been addressed and underperforming subjects, such as mathematics, are now well led. Other subjects, such as English, continue to be well led.
- Governance is strong. Governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school and use this information to hold senior leaders to account. Governors have a range of skills and experiences and offer appropriate support and challenge. They are committed to improving provision and outcomes for pupils at the school.
- The Co-op Academies Trust provides high-quality training, subject specific support and leadership development opportunities. Senior members of the trust visit the school regularly, meet with the principal and other staff and ensure that reports outline clear and helpful actions that leaders need to take.

- Pupils now make good progress overall from their different starting points and outcomes in English and mathematics have improved since the last inspection. However, attainment is consistently below the national average and Year 11 pupils made slower progress in mathematics in 2017. Action is being taken to improve outcomes in mathematics, but this is yet to have a sustained impact on the end of key stage 4 results.
- The areas for improvement identified at the time of the last inspection related to teaching have been addressed and there is some very strong teaching in the school. However, some inconsistencies remain and the most able pupils are not routinely challenged to attain the highest grades in every subject area. Leaders have plans to address this, including developing the curriculum further in order to improve attainment.
- Pupil premium funding has been used effectively to improve provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Successful strategies that have been used in Year 11 are now being used in other year groups so that progress continues to improve. However, attainment and attendance rates remain lower than those of other pupils.
- Effective careers advice, strong personal development and good progress mean that almost all Year 11 pupils have moved on to sustained places in further education since the last inspection. There has also been a huge increase in the number of pupils who then go on to higher education.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching, learning and assessment continue to improve so that they are consistently of the highest standard
- further action is taken to sustain improved outcomes in mathematics
- the most effective strategies for improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are further developed in order to increase the attainment of this group of pupils
- the most able pupils are consistently challenged to help them attain at the highest level.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Mosley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- Inspectors held meetings with the principal, other leaders and staff. The lead inspector also considered 55 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- The lead inspector spoke to the chair and the vice-chair of the governing body and the education director of the Co-op Academies Trust.
- Inspectors made 28 short visits to lessons with the principal and the vice-principal. They spoke to pupils formally and informally and observed behaviour at the start of the day, in lessons and during social time. The lead inspector also considered 70 responses to the pupils' survey.
- Inspectors considered 29 responses and 11 free-text comments on Parent View. The lead inspector also read a letter from a parent.
- Various school documents were scrutinised, including the school's self-evaluation, information about managing teachers' performance and staff training records. Minutes of meetings of the governing body and information about pupils' progress, behaviour, attendance and safety were also analysed. Documents relating to safeguarding were checked and inspectors looked at published information on the school's website.