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Mrs Nicola Williams
Principal
The Vale Academy
Atherton Way
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Dear Mrs Williams

Short inspection of The Vale Academy

Following my visit to the school on 1 November 2017 with Stephen Crossley, 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. Since your appointment, you have developed an effective leadership structure which allows you to make accurate evaluations of the strengths of the school and areas that you need to develop further. You have ensured that leadership across the school has maintained a strong focus on the progress of pupils and as a result, outcomes for pupils have improved since the last inspection. Staff have confidence in your ability to lead the school. You identify correctly areas of the school that need improvement and you utilise the support available from the Delta Academies Trust swiftly to support and improve performance in those areas.

You and your team have tackled the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report successfully. At the last inspection, you were asked to prepare students so they are better able to cope with the demands placed on them in Year 12 and, therefore, make more progress in that year. You have strengthened your 16 to 19 provision by introducing a new leadership responsibility for post-16 transition and progress. You have introduced rigour and focus in transition arrangements and as a result, students are better prepared when they join your school in Year 12 and retention rates have risen.

At the last inspection, you were asked to ensure that every opportunity is taken for pupils to improve their spelling and improve and apply their writing skills across all subjects. Through your passion for literacy you have ensured that the development of extended writing skills remains a key priority across the school and that it forms

part of planning for learning. This is evident in the delivery of lessons and in the improved outcomes for example in English, physical education and science.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your leadership team have ensured that there is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school, that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. The school has effective referral procedures and communication with external agencies is strong. This means that information is shared effectively and in a timely way. Staff receive appropriate training in child protection and you and your team ensure that you carry out appropriate checks on the suitability of all staff who work with pupils.

Pupils say that they feel safe, know whom to go to if they have any concerns and are confident that staff will deal effectively with any problems. Pupils say that bullying sometimes does happen, but when it does, teachers and leaders tackle it quickly.

Inspection findings

- You ensure that the curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the needs of all learners, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. There are appropriate courses in place to match pupils' needs, including vocational courses. You review the curriculum frequently in order to keep the breadth and balance and provide pupils with the opportunity to achieve their potential. For example, the latest changes to your curriculum are aimed at providing additional time for science and increased time allocation to option subjects, including humanities. However, it is too soon to see the impact of these changes.
- You and your leadership team ensure that teachers have relevant information about pupils' starting points and progress so that they can plan learning to meet all pupils' needs. Teachers use questioning effectively and skilfully probe pupils' understanding. Your thorough monitoring systems show that the quality of teaching is good and improving. You have correctly identified subject areas for improvement and you are taking appropriate actions to support the staff involved. For example, you identified a need to improve the consistency of strong teaching in humanities and swiftly put in place support, working with the sponsor trust, to improve outcomes in this area. The recent improvement of outcomes in modern foreign languages is evidence of the effectiveness of your interventions to improve the quality of teaching.
- Pupils take pride in their work. Their relationships with teachers are strong and encourage a positive learning environment in the lessons. As a result, pupils feel confident to ask questions and develop their learning further.
- You have established a carefully designed and targeted professional development programme for staff which is clearly linked to performance management. Staff value the support they receive, along with the opportunities for sharing good practice, and support your relentless drive for continuous improvement.

- You and your leadership team have worked tirelessly to embed a culture of good attendance across the school, including in the sixth form. As a result, pupils' attendance is consistently above the national average. You have introduced the same systems for tracking attendance across both the main school and the sixth form. As a result of close monitoring of absences, staff are able to make timely interventions. You recognise that there is still some work to do with disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities to ensure that they attend as regularly as the rest of the school.
- The new leadership of the sixth form has brought about improvements through the revised systems and processes. The newly introduced tutor system in the sixth form, along with more effective transition arrangements, starting with pupils in Year 10, lead to better prepared students when they start in Year 12. As a result, students are able to perform better, as evident in the improved outcomes for 2017. You recognise that retention rates can improve and that learners would benefit from a wider range of enrichment opportunities.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to improve the attendance of groups of pupils, particularly pupils eligible for free school meals and those who have SEN and/or disabilities
- the 16 to 19 provision continues to improve so that sixth-form students have access to a wider range of enrichment opportunities and retention rates continue to rise
- the already good teaching continues to improve consistently across the school, including in the sixth form.

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

Yours sincerely

Dimitris Spiliotis
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you and your senior leaders, middle leaders, governors and the regional director from the sponsoring trust. The inspectors also met with a range of pupils from Year 7 to Year 11 and students from Years 12 and 13. Inspectors conducted tours of the school with senior leaders, looking at pupils' work and observing their learning. The inspectors also conducted

a scrutiny of pupils' work in a range of subjects, including work produced in the sixth form.

The inspection team scrutinised and evaluated a range of documents relating to safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, performance management and school improvement. Inspectors also took account of the 68 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including the 64 extended responses from parents. They also took account of the 146 responses to the pupil questionnaire and the 44 responses to the staff questionnaire.