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Mr Ross Moody
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Moody

Short inspection of St Ursula's E-ACT Academy

Following my visit to the school on 20 March 2018, 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 January 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

You, together with the leadership team and officers of the E-ACT Academy Trust, have addressed the priorities for improvement identified at the previous inspection resolutely. For example, middle leaders now have marked impact on improving the quality of teaching in their areas of responsibility, and they lead with rigour and enthusiasm. In addition, teaching assistants now have clearly defined responsibilities and contribute well to the progress that pupils make.

Your ambitious vision for continuous improvement extends across the school community. High-quality professional development and partnerships with other schools have led to improvements in the quality of teaching, leadership and governance. For example, subject leaders have opportunities to initiate developments across the trust. This improves their leadership capacity and has raised standards of teaching as a consequence. Leaders from the trust have offered you strong strategic support. It is clear that parents, carers and staff share your high expectations and unrelenting drive to improve further. One comment from a parent, typifying the views of many, was: 'The teaching staff are caring and nurturing but also get results. I can't speak highly enough of this fabulous school.'

Pupils' attainment of the standards expected in reading, writing mathematics is higher than the national averages by the end of both Year 2 and Year 6. In addition, higher proportions than the national averages achieved greater depth by the end of Year 2 and the higher standards by the end of Year 6. In the phonics screening check, almost all pupils reached the expected standard. Children in the early years are well prepared for Year 1, achieving strong levels of development. You rightly identify that some groups of pupils could make even better progress. As a result, we agreed that this short inspection would focus on these pupils.

Pupils are proud to attend St Ursula's. They say that they feel safe and that there is no bullying. They speak highly of the school's broad and relevant curriculum, including opportunities to develop their computing skills and creativity through art and design. They value the school's work to promote equality and fairness through activities such as the certificates awarded for respecting others in assemblies. Pupils told me that they feel listened to and understood. A comment from one pupil, 'Students are involved in things which affect them; we get to make decisions', summarises their view of the supportive and respectful relationships that you have established between adults and pupils.

At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed on the key lines of enquiry to be considered. These included: how well pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds progress in writing and mathematics at key stage 1; how well pupils of middle ability, including those who are disadvantaged, progress in their reading at key stage 2; how effectively leaders ensure challenge for the most able in writing in key stage 2; and how effectively leaders make sure that pupils are kept safe and attend school as regularly as they can. These aspects are reported under 'Inspection findings' and 'Safeguarding'.

Safeguarding is effective.

A culture of ensuring the safeguarding and welfare of pupils is of utmost importance to the school. Staff have secure knowledge and receive regularly updated training which helps them to identify and report concerns. Leaders enhance this training beyond statutory requirements. For example, staff have recently been trained to support pupils' mental health in school. Safeguarding leaders follow up all concerns promptly and appropriately. In addition, leaders act swiftly to coordinate support when a pupil or family is experiencing difficulties.

Leaders ensure that arrangements for checking the suitability of staff and visitors are thorough and managed well. The trust's safeguarding officer and governors check and review these procedures assiduously. This expertise ensures that record-keeping is of a high standard. Additionally, the carefully planned work of the family liaison and attendance officer has resulted in a rise in pupils' rates of attendance and a decline in the number of pupils who regularly miss school.

Inspection findings

- Published performance information from 2017 shows that the small group of disadvantaged pupils in key stage 1 did not progress as well as their peers in writing and mathematics.
- A number of changes and improvements are securing higher standards. For example, recent work to improve pupils' problem-solving and reasoning skills is resulting in stronger progress in mathematics. Pupils show deeper mathematical thinking and are often required to explain and justify answers, both verbally and in writing. Leaders have also improved the way teachers check pupils' progress. Consequently, pupils receive more effective teaching and support in mathematics. All disadvantaged pupils in Year 2 are currently on track to achieve the standard expected of them.
- We reviewed disadvantaged pupils' written work together. Pupils are making good progress in sentence construction and their use of punctuation. Most pupils are currently achieving the standard expected. However, we noted that a small number of lower-attaining pupils need further support to apply their well-developed phonics skills and understanding of spelling patterns in their writing. You acknowledged the importance of improving disadvantaged pupils' writing further.
- The focus on middle-ability pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, in key stage 2 was chosen because pupils in this group made less progress in reading than their peers in the 2017 assessments. You recognise that middle-ability and disadvantaged pupils have made less progress in reading. You have introduced highly effective measures to raise standards. Investment in more challenging reading materials for teaching reading, as well as reviewing how teachers plan reading lessons, are both having a marked impact on learning.
- Teachers now plan lessons with a strong emphasis on the key skills of deduction, prediction and inference. More confident readers, including those of middle ability, are required to consider how the writers use language. Pupils are now expected to answer more demanding questions about what they read and to justify their viewpoints. Evidence in workbooks and from listening to readers shows that middle-ability readers are now making strong progress across key stage 2, with many now reaching the higher standard. You recognise that the work to raise more middle-ability pupils to the higher standard in reading, particularly those who are disadvantaged, should be a continuing priority for the school.
- You showed me the measures in place to increase the challenge provided to the most able writers in key stage 2. We checked a number of pupils' workbooks from across the key stage. Raised expectations of how pupils plan, review and edit their writing have improved outcomes and you expect these improvements to have a sustained impact. Pupils use their understanding of a wide range of stylistic devices and their broad vocabulary with notable effect in narrative and non-fiction writing. Extended writing in subjects such as religious education and history is of a similarly high standard to work in English books, and this consolidates pupils' skills.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- disadvantaged pupils with lower starting points in key stage 1 use their knowledge of phonics when spelling unfamiliar words
- the progress of disadvantaged pupils improves to match that of other pupils in all subjects.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the school ambassadors group, the chief executive officer of the E-ACT Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for the City of Bristol. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Claire Mirams
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and your leadership team. I held meetings with the chief executive officer of the E-ACT Academy Trust, and the academies improvement director. I reviewed your plans for improvement, your evaluation of the school's performance and current information about pupils' attainment and progress. We conducted learning walks and reviewed pupils' work together. I met with the chair of the academy ambassadors group. I also met with leaders of mathematics, special educational needs and/or disabilities, English and assessment. I listened to pupils read and reviewed their reading records. I met with a group of pupils and discussed their views on the curriculum, behaviour, bullying and keeping safe. I scrutinised various safeguarding records as well as meeting with your safeguarding leaders, the regional safeguarding officer and the family liaison and attendance officer. I considered the 132 parental responses to the online survey, Parent view.