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4 May 2018

Ms Caroline Vernon
Headteacher
Victoria Academy
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Dear Ms Vernon

Short inspection of Victoria Academy

Following my visit to the school on 25 April 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in July 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

You have a clear philosophy on how to best educate the pupils that attend Victoria Academy. You believe that broadening pupils' experiences inside and outside the classroom improves their learning and promotes their personal development. You say this is because pupils can more easily understand what they need to learn and why. Additionally, you say that having opportunities to apply their learning will further engage pupils, raising their achievement. The impact of your philosophy is clearly seen in pupils' attitudes and behaviour. Pupils love coming to this school. They are happy, feel secure and are keen to learn. These broadening opportunities are extensive and diverse. They range from excellent experiences of the world of work to visiting an agricultural college and seeing lambs being born. You also ensure that all pupils get opportunities to develop their leadership skills. For example, every week, all pupils take part in their year group parliament. This is modelled on Britain's democratic process. Pupils take turns to be 'speaker' and to present bills for the consideration of all members. There are meaningful votes, and you make every effort to adopt changes proposed by pupils. Through their parliament, pupils learn how to listen to others and to present persuasive arguments. They accept that people have different opinions and respect that. They develop skills in speaking confidently. This opportunity helps pupils to become thoughtful, considerate and active young citizens.

The accumulation of all the pupils' school experiences results in outstanding

spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Their respectful and tolerant attitudes towards each other and towards adults are outstanding. Pupils attend well and grasp the opportunities that you ensure are provided for them.

Teachers acknowledge the benefits of being part of an academy trust. They say that collaborative staff training and moderation of pupils' work help them to reflect on their practice and improve it. They also believe that roles being shared across the multi-academy trust improves efficiency and relieves them from some of the non-teaching aspects of their work, giving them more time to focus on teaching. Your passion to ensure that the school does everything it can for every pupil is infectious. You inspire teachers and teaching assistants and, in turn, they aspire to provide an excellent education.

Safeguarding is effective.

The culture of care that pervades the school ensures that every adult and pupil believes that they have a responsibility for everyone's safety and they can flourish. Pupils' sense of social justice and their trust in staff ensure that they will seek help if they are concerned for themselves or any pupil in the school. Pupils have been trained in how to be safe and how to respond if they are concerned about a situation or have concerns about a fellow pupil.

School leaders maintain highly effective arrangements and procedures that ensure pupils are safe.

Record-keeping is systematic and meticulous, which enables suitable people to have efficient access to important and accurate information. School leaders know which agencies need to be involved in order to provide good safeguarding systems in their area. Leaders further enhance the safeguarding of their pupils by being prepared to raise concerns if they believe an agency is not fulfilling its responsibility.

Inspection findings

- You and other academy leaders have demonstrated your ability to accurately analyse the performance of the school and, based on this, drive further improvement successfully. You have led many significant changes to the fundamental structure of the school which have contributed to improving standards in all year groups. One such change was to develop the role of teaching assistants. They now play an integral function in leading on aspects of teaching. From a pupil's point of view, there is no perceptible difference in the status between teachers and teaching assistants. Many teaching assistants take a lead on researching and influencing school policy on how best to teach aspects of learning. While the impact of their work is easily identifiable in the teaching of literacy, they have in fact influenced teaching throughout the school. This increased capacity has enabled you to improve significantly the help that is given to pupils whose progress slows. Teachers and teaching assistants constantly monitor pupils' understanding. They quickly identify pupils who are not grasping their learning and, as soon as the following day, teaching assistants will give

specific support, ensuring that these pupils do not fall behind. Pupils of all abilities benefit from this support.

- Standards of achievement recovered well from a dip in 2016 because, in 2017, teachers adapted their teaching to better meet the requirements of the new curriculum. They also became more confident in assessing pupils' understanding and progress.
- Of particular note was the marked improvement in the progress that pupils made in mathematics. You had ensured that all staff considered, in detail, how best to teach the new mathematics curriculum to Victoria Academy's pupils. Teachers made changes to the style of lessons, believing that frequent reinforcement of basic skills was important. They also ensured that pupils were given ample opportunity to practise these mathematical skills in practical situations, solving problems. Teachers have continued to refine the way they teach mathematics and current pupils are making strong progress in this subject across all year groups.
- Pupils have made consistently good progress in writing over many years. Within the school, there is considerable expertise in knowing how to teach pupils to write very well. This strong practice is disseminated to all teachers and teaching assistants.
- You have rightly identified reading as an aspect of provision that is not as strong as other aspects. Nevertheless, pupils' standards in reading are broadly in line with standards seen nationally. Generally, pupils read short passages well. However, when reading long and complex texts, they tend to lose their ability to understand fully the messages being conveyed by the writer. Improvements to pupils' reading are being driven through all aspects of the curriculum and the wider culture of the school.
- Typical of your leadership, you accurately identified that the rates of progress of disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils had not been as strong as those of other groups. You introduced carefully considered strategies to remedy this. Some pupils are now given very varied and specific support to overcome their particular barriers to learning. Consequently, the differences in achievement between these groups of pupils and others are diminishing.
- You and your staff have embraced the opportunities for curriculum development that came with the conversion of the school to an academy. You encouraged teachers to investigate different ways of teaching subjects beyond English and mathematics. This resulted in the school agreeing to teach science, technology and humanities differently. Teachers now require pupils to enquire about and investigate into the answers to challenging questions. While it is too early to evaluate the impact of this development on pupils' achievement, it does illustrate your desire and that of the academy staff to constantly strive for improvement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to improve pupils' capacity to read longer and more difficult texts and further develop pupils' reading comprehension skills.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cumbria. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Neil Mackenzie
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Throughout the inspection, we discussed many aspects of your school, and we visited classes and scrutinised pupils' work. I met with six members of the governing body and spoke with two representatives of the multi-academy trust. I spoke with groups of pupils during their lunchtime. I scrutinised school documents, including safeguarding checks, information about pupils' achievement and records of checks on the quality of teaching. I examined child protection information. I took account of the 15 responses from staff to an inspection survey. I considered the views of the 28 parents and carers who texted me their comments and the 20 pupils who completed an inspection survey.