

Veritas Primary Academy

Weston Road, Stafford, Staffordshire ST18 0FL

Inspection dates

24–25 April 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher has established an ambitious culture of high expectations for all. In only a short time since the school opened, leaders at all levels have established a calm and purposeful atmosphere. All children are welcome and thrive at Veritas.
- The headteacher, with the support of committed and caring staff, has ensured that pupils' social and emotional needs are addressed exceptionally well. Support for personal development and well-being is outstanding.
- Children are happy at school and keen to learn. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school. They value highly the care and support staff provide for their children.
- Standards at the end of key stage 2 are above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Despite the fact that many pupils join the school part-way through the year, the vast majority of pupils across the school make good progress from their starting points.
- Attainment in mathematics improved in 2017. More pupils achieved the higher standard at the end of key stage 2.
- Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities make good progress as a result of effective support.
- The curriculum is innovative. Pupils enjoy exciting topics or 'learning adventures' which get them hooked into learning quickly. They are engaged and motivated learners. Pupils now need more opportunities to discuss their learning.
- Leaders ensure that teachers receive good-quality support and training to develop their skills. Teachers regularly discuss what good learning looks like.
- The good quality of provision in the early years ensures that children develop their skills quickly. They are keen to learn and make good progress.
- In a few lessons, the most able pupils are not provided with sufficient challenge.
- Some teachers do not correct pupils' errors of punctuation, spelling and grammar as rigorously as they should. Pupils do not know well enough how to learn from their mistakes.
- Although governors are developing their skills, they recognise there is more work needed to strengthen governance. Governance is still transitional from when the school opened in 2015.
- Safeguarding is effective. Staff are sensitive to children's feelings. They are vigilant to changes in pupils' behaviour and respond quickly when additional support is needed.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- In order to maintain the current high attainment and improve outcomes further for the most able pupils, leaders should ensure that:
 - all teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve, particularly in spelling, punctuation and grammar
 - teachers and other adults develop pupils' learning skills by providing more opportunities for pupils to take risks with their learning and to understand how to learn from mistakes
 - pupils have more time and opportunity to articulate their thinking
 - the existing good practice is shared even more widely
 - a substantive local governing body is confirmed as soon as possible.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher has ensured that Veritas Academy is a positive and welcoming environment for all pupils. Her high expectations of behaviour and support are well established. All staff care about the well-being of the pupils. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the education provided for their children. As one parent said, 'Veritas is a lovely community that seems to put the children at the heart of all activities, working in partnership with its families.'
- Many middle leaders have received support to develop their leadership skills. As a result of the headteacher's commitment to continuous professional development, teachers have grown into leaders within the school. This helps to retain teachers and ensures that there is 'home-grown' talent to take over when there is an opening.
- Leaders at all levels are involved in analysing school performance data and identifying priorities for improvement. They use this information to plan the curriculum, taking into account the needs of pupils. Teachers are invited to suggest particular topics they are passionate about so that pupils benefit from teachers' enthusiasm. Teachers say that this helps them to see the bigger picture of where the school needs to develop. Teachers value the opportunities they have to engage in professional dialogue, challenging and explaining what they teach and why.
- The school uses additional funding exceptionally well to improve outcomes for all pupils. The physical education and sport premium pays for a sports coach to lead lunchtime activities and provide training for staff. Pupils enter a growing number of local sports competitions, with increasing success.
- Other additional funding, such as the pupil premium and the service children premium, is used very effectively to provide support for pupils' social and emotional health and well-being. The family liaison officer works closely with families to access appropriate support so that children come to school ready to learn.
- The school has invested in a number of initiatives to bridge the gap between school and home, which is particularly important when parents work away from home. One example of this is a joint reading project where pupils and their parents read the same book then complete activities in a workbook. They discuss what they have read and the activities during telephone calls home. In this way, pupils feel a strong connection to their absent parents through positive and engaging extended conversations.
- Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. They learn about British values such as democracy through the school parliament. They hold elections and vote for their class representatives. Parliament members are involved in key decisions about school life, such as which after-school activities should be run.
- Activities to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are threaded throughout the curriculum. All pupils learn to play a musical instrument. Music lessons and singing assemblies take place each week. Songs include clear messages about resilience and personal growth, which help to strengthen pupils' social and emotional health.
- Staff from the REAch2 multi-academy trust have supported the headteacher and

governors in establishing an ambitious culture. Before the school opened and during the first year, the trust provided additional leadership capacity as it recognised the particular demands on leaders in a new school. Governors receive support from the trust's governor support staff. Many staff, including the headteacher, joined the school from other REAch2 schools. This has helped to reinforce the headteacher's key messages, which are consistent with the ethos of the REAch2 trust.

Governance of the school

- The chair of governors knows the school well, despite taking up her role relatively recently. She is committed to ensuring that governors have the necessary skills and expertise.
- A skills audit has been carried out and training needs have been identified. However, because of the transient nature of the school community, it has been difficult to recruit and retain governors with the necessary expertise. As a result, membership of the governing body has been fluid.
- There is evidence in the minutes of governing body meetings that governors are asking increasingly challenging questions. However, governance is not yet as effective as it needs to be.
- The governing body was established as a transitional board at the time the school opened in 2015. The chair of governors and the deputy regional director of the trust are committed to establishing a substantive governing body as soon as possible.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The safety and well-being of pupils are at the heart of the school's work. The headteacher's commitment to safeguarding ensures that there are sufficient resources to help pupils when they need support. The family liaison officer works closely with pupils and their families and provides training for staff. As a result, staff rigorously follow up concerns raised.
- There are high expectations of all staff to be vigilant and sensitive to pupils' needs. Pupils know that adults will listen to them and take action if needed. As a result, children feel safe and they thrive here.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Pupils enjoy learning because teachers design activities that engage and excite them. The curriculum encourages pupils to take ownership of their learning by immersion in creative curriculum topics such as 'Tomb Raider' and the Titanic.
- Each topic begins with a 'sensational start' to hook pupils' interest. For example, pupils enjoyed a multi-sensory experience in the cinema room. A panoramic beach scene was projected onto the walls, surrounding pupils in the sights and sounds of the beach. This was complemented by pebbles, shells and sand on the floor. Seaside smells added to the atmosphere and helped to bring the scene to life. As a result of this immersive

stimulus, pupils used sophisticated vocabulary to create high-quality descriptive writing, such as 'echoing sounds from shells', 'the ombre sea' and 'the smell of salt hangs in the air'.

- Pupils complete extended homework projects which clearly demonstrate their love of learning and engagement in the topics. Corridors and classrooms are beautifully decorated with pupils' models, posters and other interactive displays, such as volcanoes and stories. Pupils take great pride in their work. They respect each other's work and ensure that displays are well looked after.
- Teachers and other adults have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. As a result, pupils settle quickly to start work in lessons without delay. They respond promptly to instructions without fuss.
- Teachers' strong subject knowledge supports pupils' learning. Teachers routinely use technical vocabulary for mathematics and English, which supports pupils' learning. When pupils are given the opportunity to respond, they use technical vocabulary with ease to articulate their thinking. Most teachers have high expectations of pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar but, in one or two classes, this is not the always the case.
- When teachers ask questions to assess pupils' learning, pupils are not always given sufficient time to consider and formulate extended responses by, for example, being asked to justify their answers. As a result, pupils are not always able to demonstrate the full depth of their learning.
- There is room for the most able pupils to be challenged further. In some classes, all pupils work through the same activities, which become increasingly difficult. However, the most able pupils do not need to complete activities that do not challenge them or move their learning on.
- The special educational needs coordinator ensures that teachers receive professional development to support all pupils' needs. She provides regular advice and guidance to teachers and teaching assistants through weekly drop-in sessions. As a result, support for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is effective and pupils make good progress. Adults and pupils recognise that children behave and learn differently for a variety of reasons. Teachers and other adults respond sensitively to pupils' needs.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Support for pupils' social and emotional well-being is a strength of the school. The caring staff provide a comprehensive range of interventions. The headteacher researches the most effective activities that are shown to have an impact on the specific needs of pupils in this unique setting. For example, yoga sessions at lunchtime were introduced to support pupils' physical development, which was identified as an area for improvement in the early years data. Pupils whose parents are working away from home can visit Base Camp, a support group to help them discuss and understand their feelings.
- Many pupils join the school part-way through the school year. Some pupils move

schools frequently because of the nature of their parents' work. The headteacher recognises the impact this can have on pupils' learning and ensures that pupils receive the best possible support to settle quickly. For example, pupils are supported to make friends as soon as possible, which, research shows, reduces the impact of mobility on pupils' progress. Pupils new to the school say that they feel welcome and happy there after only a few days.

- Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe, including online. They are confident that the school protects them from accessing inappropriate material online and they know what to do if a stranger tries to befriend them online. Staying safe and forming happy relationships are threaded through the curriculum. Incidents of bullying are extremely rare. Pupils are confident that staff resolve any issues quickly.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They are polite and respectful at all times. They are universally proud of their school. Year 6 pupils wear their blazers with a sense of honour. They proudly take on responsibilities such as play leaders for younger pupils at lunchtime.
- The school is a calm and orderly environment. Pupils respond quickly to teachers and other adults. As a result, disruptions to learning are extremely rare. The number of recorded incidents of poor behaviour is low. Pupils are keen to win reward points.
- Attendance is in line with the national average and has improved since last year. Staff work supportively with parents to improve attendance and punctuality. However, leaders take more effective action if parents do not respond to support.
- Leaders are very reluctant to exclude any pupils. They know that, for many vulnerable pupils, school is the safest place for them to be. There is comprehensive support for pupils who need it. As a result, exclusions are extremely rare.
- Well-established routines and clear expectations of behaviour mean that pupils settle quickly when they arrive part-way through the year. All pupils are welcome here, including those with challenging behaviour.
- Behaviour in lessons is good because of the positive relationships between adults and pupils. Pupils respond well to challenge. They engage enthusiastically in discussions that help them to clarify their thinking and develop independence as learners. In some lessons, teachers do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to do this, which limits their learning.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- At both key stages 1 and 2, a higher-than-average proportion of pupils achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics in 2017.
- Following the school's first set of results in 2016, leaders identified that not enough pupils were achieving at greater depth in key stage 1 or at the higher standard at the end of key stage 2 in reading, writing or mathematics. Consequently, leaders ensured that teachers provided increased challenge for the most able pupils.
- As a result, the proportion of pupils achieving at the higher standard at the end of key

stage 2 in mathematics and spelling, punctuation and grammar increased in 2017.

- There were similar improvements at key stage 1, where the proportion of pupils achieving at greater depth in writing and mathematics improved in 2017 to be above national averages.
- Work in pupils' books shows that a high proportion of pupils are on track to achieve the expected standard for their age in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of the academic year. Where this is not the case, leaders explained the factors, such as medical needs or mobility, which can have an impact on outcomes for individual pupils, and the actions they are taking to address this.
- Many pupils who join the school part-way through the year arrive with very little information about their prior attainment. Teachers carry out detailed assessments to establish the most appropriate starting point for each pupil. Where there are gaps in their skills, teachers ensure that pupils make rapid progress to fill the gaps. By the time pupils leave the school at the end of key stage 2, a higher-than-average proportion achieve at the expected standard.
- The school's analysis of current progress indicates that a high proportion of pupils are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics across the school. Work in pupils' books and lesson observations in most classes confirm this. Where this is not the case, leaders are aware of the reasons and are taking effective action to improve progress quickly.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities progress well. Some pupils who join the school part-way through the year arrive with limited information about their needs. The school works quickly to identify any additional support pupils need to ensure that they make rapid progress. Support takes place in the classroom as far as possible, rather than in small withdrawal groups. This ensures that the class teacher can monitor progress more easily and ensure that support is effective.

Early years provision

Good

- In the early years, children are supported well by committed and caring staff. Teachers and other adults design exciting learning activities. Positive relationships and well-established routines support children's learning effectively. As a result, they make good progress from their starting points.
- In 2017, a higher-than-average proportion of children achieved a good level of development. However, boys did not achieve as well as girls, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics, as well as in language and communication. Leaders are addressing this by ensuring that reading books appeal to boys just as much as girls. For example, children were reading a story about 'Superworm', listing his superpowers and comparing him with a garden worm. Boys especially were visibly excited at the prospect of worm-hunting outside.
- Current assessment information, children's books and observations during the inspection indicate that a high proportion of pupils are on track to achieve a good level of development by the end of Reception this year.
- Staff ensure that no opportunity to learn is missed. At snack time, for example, children were sitting in small groups around a table, counting out the correct number

of pieces of fruit indicated by labels on the bowls. As a result, children developed their number recognition, as well as their social skills.

- The early years leader knows the children well. She monitors the provision and the quality of teaching to ensure that all children make good progress. She has correctly identified that reading and challenge for the most able are priorities for improvement.
- Children's learning and development are recorded using an online system which parents can access remotely. Parents appreciate this as it helps them to keep in touch with their children even when their work takes them away from home.
- The environment, inside and out, is stimulating and supports children's learning well. The purpose-built early years building, designed with the help of the headteacher, provides a safe space in which children can learn. Inspectors observed children using climbing equipment safely, supported by the sports coach, who helped them to identify and manage any risks.

School details

Unique reference number	140381
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	10048311

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	282
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Mrs Jan Gormley
Headteacher	Angela Kerr
Telephone number	01785 333 400
Website	www.veritasprimaryacademy.com
Email address	office@veritasprimaryacademy.com
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Veritas Primary Academy is an average-sized primary school.
- The school first opened in September 2015 and is growing to two forms of entry in each year. Currently there are two forms of entry in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2, but only one form of entry in each year in key stage 2.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is considerably lower than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils joining and leaving the school part-way through the year is much higher than the national average.
- The school meets the government's floor standards.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors held a number of meetings with leaders and observed lessons jointly with senior leaders where possible.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of the governing body and looked at minutes of governing body meetings.
- The lead inspector met with the deputy regional director of the REAch2 multi-academy trust.
- The school's single central record was checked. The lead inspector met with the head teacher as the designated safeguarding lead and the family liaison officer to discuss the school's safeguarding practice.
- A range of other school documents were reviewed, including the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan, assessment information and current attendance figures.
- Inspectors talked to pupils in lessons, in the playground and in the dining hall, and asked them about what it is like to be a pupil in the school. Thirty responses to the pupil survey were also taken into account.
- Inspectors spoke with a number of parents at the start of the school day and took account of 34 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including free-text responses.
- Inspectors took account of 27 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and spoke to teachers and other adults about the support and training they receive and how they keep pupils safe.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read and looked at a range of pupils' work, including English, mathematics, science and humanities.

Inspection team

Jane Spilsbury, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Linda Brown	Ofsted Inspector
Ellen Taylor	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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