

31 December 2018

Mr David Alston, Executive Principal and Mrs Jackie Williams, Principal  
The Crescent Academy  
Pinewood Crescent  
Meir  
Stoke-on-Trent  
Staffordshire  
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Dear Mr Alston and Mrs Williams

### **Short inspection of The Crescent Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 11 December 2018 with Susan Blackburn, 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 2014.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

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

Leaders have ensured that The Crescent Academy is an exciting learning community. All pupils are well supported. Parents and carers say that their children are happy and safe here.

Pupils enjoy learning because teachers make lessons exciting and fun. Teachers use a wide range of approaches to support pupils' learning and well-being. Additionally, the multi-sensory classroom provides an alternative, calming environment where pupils work more flexibly with soft music and soothing images projected onto the walls.

Leaders and governors have a firm understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They have evaluated the quality of education thoroughly and identified clear priorities for improvement based on the needs of all pupils in the school.

Leaders are proud of the pupils' achievements so far. They are ambitious for all pupils to achieve to the best of their ability in all subjects. However, currently, pupils do not achieve as well in reading as they do in writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2.

Pupils are respectful and polite to each other and to visitors. They have many

opportunities to take on roles of responsibility. As a result, many pupils behave with a maturity that is beyond their years. They are confident and ready to move on to the next stage of their education. Pupils respect the diverse cultures and faiths present in the school. Displays across the school celebrate the rich cultural experiences accessed by pupils, such as a residential trip to France.

The corridors are vividly decorated to bring learning to life. In one area, pupils are encouraged to act as explorers to find out information about different parts of the world. In another area, an extensive display of poppies reminds pupils of the sacrifices made by the armed forces, past and present.

The outdoor environment is equally lively and engaging. Pupils, with appropriate adult supervision, enjoy exploring the forest and pond in the school's grounds. The library boat, housed in a refurbished narrowboat, makes reading fun and attractive to even the most reluctant reader.

Pastoral support is a strength of the school. Children and families benefit from comprehensive support provided in the well-being centre. Staff are always available to help parents as well as children with workshops, and one-to-one support when it is needed.

The leadership of the school has been stable for many years. You have both been in post as principal and executive principal since before the school became an academy in 2012. However, as you are both stepping down at the end of this academic year, governors have been proactive and have already appointed a new principal who will start in September 2019.

There is currently some crossover between the roles and responsibilities of the local governing body and the board of trustees. The chair of the board of trustees is also the chair of the local governing body. A recent review correctly identifies that this relationship needs to be revised, so that it is clear how leaders are held to account.

You have addressed a number of the areas for improvement from the last inspection effectively. Leaders at all levels have had extensive training to improve their skills. They now lead staff development and carry out monitoring activities. All staff take part in coaching conversations to help them develop their skills. Subject leaders are knowledgeable and well supported by senior leaders to develop in their roles. They have ownership over their areas of responsibility and are held to account effectively for outcomes in their subjects.

The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard for their age in mathematics by the end of key stage 2 is above the national average, reflecting the school's systematic approach to the teaching of mathematics. This approach enables teachers to plan the sequence of pupils' learning well, so that pupils build on their learning step by step. Increasingly, teachers ask pupils to explain how they solved problems. This helps to develop pupils' vocabulary and confidence.

In early years, many children enter Reception Year with skills well below those

expected for their age, particularly in terms of language and communication. From their low starting points, many children progress well. However, over the last three years, a lower proportion of children than the national average achieved a good level of development.

The teaching of phonics is consistently strong and well organised. In 2018, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1 increased to be above the national average.

Since the last inspection, attendance has improved and is now in line with the national average. There is little difference in the attendance rates for different groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

You have revised the approach to the teaching of writing since the last inspection. Teachers now consistently follow a clear writing process, which begins with a stimulating experience to hook pupils into the theme. For example, on one occasion, 'Dracula' visited the school and pupils designed posters to warn staff about him. Wherever possible, pupils write for a real audience. For example, pupils recently wrote letters in support of the 'Save the Whale' campaign. Before pupils start writing, teachers share an example, so that pupils understand the main features of the genre. Pupils draft and re-draft their writing, responding to feedback from the teacher and other pupils. They then produce their final versions. The writing pupils produce in English lessons is of a high standard.

However, despite these improvements, pupils still do not have sufficient opportunities to apply their writing skills across the curriculum. In subjects other than English, pupils make routine errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar in their writing. The tasks teachers set across the wider curriculum limit pupils' opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff receive regular training and support. They are vigilant and report any signs of abuse or neglect promptly. Staff work proactively with families to ensure that children are protected and supported. The school employs staff with specific expertise in supporting families. This means that pupils and families can access the support they need in school, reducing the wait for external services.

### **Inspection findings**

- In 2018, the proportion of pupils achieving the standard expected for their age in reading by the end of key stages 1 and 2 was below the national averages. Spoken language and communication skills are a barrier to learning for many pupils. To address this, teachers now design activities to support pupils' language development more effectively. Pupils are well supported to read texts more closely, asking themselves questions as they read. Reading strategies such as inference and deduction are now taught explicitly. This is particularly helpful for

pupils with SEND or those who speak English as an additional language. In lessons, pupils talk confidently about how they are applying these skills in their reading and how it helps them to understand the texts more easily.

- Leaders have focused on developing pupils' enjoyment of reading. The school's library boat is well stocked with a range of engaging texts to appeal to all readers, particularly boys. Pupils receive rewards for reading as often as possible at home and at school. Teachers and teaching assistants take every incidental opportunity, no matter how brief, to read with pupils. Pupils record in their reading diaries not just what they have read, but also how they have applied their reading skills. As a result of this concerted focus on reading, many pupils have developed a genuine love of reading. Current assessment information indicates that progress is improving for reading. However, in their free choice of reading books, pupils sometimes choose familiar types of books that are often not challenging enough. Teachers do not actively encourage pupils to extend the range of their reading material. As a result, pupils do not benefit fully from the opportunity to broaden their horizons through reading.
- In early years, staff are well trained to support children's learning. Adults plan learning well across the setting. They ask questions that prompt children's thinking and model language effectively. Relationships between adults and children are strong. Adults assess and record children's progress accurately. From their low starting points, children make good progress in many areas of the early years curriculum. However, children's progress in reading and writing does not accelerate sufficiently by the end of Reception to ensure that they have the basic skills they need to move into Year 1. As a result, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of Reception Year has been well below the national average for the last three years.
- Current assessment information and work in pupils' books show that the achievement of disadvantaged pupils is in line with that of their peers. Leaders ensure that all staff are aware of the challenges sometimes faced by disadvantaged pupils and how to overcome them. They ensure that pupil premium funding is spent effectively to remove these barriers. They monitor the progress of disadvantaged pupils closely and report regularly to governors on the impact of interventions. Governors challenge leaders to ensure that the funding is used effectively.
- The strong pastoral support in the school is of particular benefit to disadvantaged pupils. Attendance for disadvantaged pupils is in line with the national average. Disadvantaged pupils have many opportunities to take part in activities outside school that may not ordinarily be available to them. The school uses a variety of methods for parents and their children to access interactive resources, so that any parents and pupils who do not have access to a computer are not disadvantaged.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils are actively encouraged to read a wider range of challenging texts
- teachers set more challenging tasks in subjects other than mathematics and English, so that pupils can apply their writing skills and demonstrate their knowledge and understanding across the curriculum more effectively
- teachers have consistently high expectations of pupils' spelling, punctuation, grammar and handwriting in subjects other than English
- children's progress in reading and writing accelerates in early years, so that the proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of Reception increases to be in line with the national average
- the relationship between the board of trustees and the local governing body is clarified, so that trustees can hold leaders to account more effectively for improving outcomes.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, 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

Jane Spilsbury  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

In preparation for the inspection, I looked at a range of information, including the previous inspection report, the published achievement information and the school's website.

We agreed the areas of focus and the timetable for the day during our initial discussion. We also discussed current assessment information, the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan and monitoring information. We visited lessons together and we discussed our observations. The vice-principal visited lessons with another inspector. I met with the chair of the governing body and another governor. I also spoke to parents as they dropped off their children in the morning. I also took account of the responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. We spoke to pupils during lessons and at breaktime. An inspector listened to pupils read. I took account of the responses to the pupil survey and the staff survey.