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Mrs Jane Garner  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Garner

### **Short inspection of Dukesgate Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 12 February 2019, 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 June 2014.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. There have been some significant changes in the school's leadership and management since the previous inspection. The school joined United Learning Multi-Academy Trust on 1 February 2019. The school was previously part of Salford Academy Trust. Almost all members of the local governing body have been appointed since the previous inspection. The new multi-academy trust has maintained this local governing board. The school appointed two assistant headteachers to increase leadership capacity.

Leaders, governors and staff share an ambitious vision for the pupils at Dukesgate. They have established a culture where there are 'no excuses'. Every child at this school is treated as an individual. Staff personalise the school's offer to help each pupil overcome any barriers to their learning, whether academic, social or personal. As a result, pupils make good progress from their starting points across the school.

Dukesgate is a warm, welcoming, happy school. Pupils are polite, kind and considerate. They listen attentively to their teachers, get on well with their classmates and are keen to lend a hand around school. Pupils take pride in their work. They take care with their handwriting, set their work out neatly and try hard with the work their teachers set them.

Pupils take part in a wealth of exciting opportunities which enhance their school life. The Year 6 residential trip tested pupils' mettle with some challenging activities,

such as the high-wire walk. Younger pupils enjoyed learning about life in Roman Britain during their visit to Chester. Pupils take part enthusiastically in after-school clubs, such as choir and gymnastics. Pupils are proud to represent their school, for example playing in inter-school rounders matches.

The early years environment is a hive of activity. The school's youngest children embrace the wealth of opportunities both indoors and outdoors. Children settle quickly into Nursery and Reception classes. These young children get off to a good start. High-quality phonics teaching helps children develop their early reading and writing skills well. Children grasp mathematical concepts and language through a wide variety of play experiences. By the time they move into Year 1, most children have made strong progress to reach a good level of development.

Staff morale is good. Staff enjoy coming to work. They value the training and support that they receive to help them do their jobs effectively. Staff have enjoyed the opportunities to shape the school's curriculum, improve the effectiveness of their teaching and enhance pupils' progress. They feel that changes made by leaders have freed them up to focus on those tasks which make the most positive difference to the pupils.

Parents and carers are valued partners in their children's education. They receive regular updates about their children's progress. They are confident that staff will listen and act on any concerns they may raise. The school's head of inclusion and headteacher know pupils and their families well. They go 'above and beyond' to make sure that those families who are struggling get the help they need.

At the previous inspection, inspectors asked leaders to build on good teaching and raise pupils' achievement. Leaders and teachers have identified and implemented the approaches which are most likely to work well for their pupils. The assistant headteacher has provided training and support for all teachers and support staff. This training has helped staff understand why and how they are expected to make changes. Staff and pupils testify to the positive differences that the new approaches are making. These changes have helped to improve the quality of teaching so that pupils are making stronger progress across the school in recent years.

Inspectors also asked leaders to develop long-term planning to make sure skills and knowledge are taught in depth and build on what has gone before, across the full range of subjects. Senior leaders and subject leaders have worked together to revise and improve the school's curriculum. A wealth of training and support has helped teachers feel more confident and competent to deliver the broad body of knowledge set out in the school's new curriculum plans. Pupils are engaged and enthused by what they are being taught. There is still more work to do to further refine and improve the school's curriculum design. As teachers implement the new plans, some refinements are required to make sure that pupils progress in their knowledge across all subjects.

Leaders have focused their energies on the design of assessments for reading, writing and mathematics. It is early days in the development of assessment in other

subjects. Now that teachers are implementing the new curriculum plans, leaders are turning their attention to designing reliable, well-thought-out assessments of pupils' learning.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders make sure thorough checks are carried out on all staff before they take up employment. These ensure that staff are suitable to work with children.

Comprehensive training makes sure that staff know their roles and responsibilities. The designated safeguarding leader work closely with families and external agencies to make sure that the school's most vulnerable pupils get the help and support they need.

Pupils are adamant that bullying is rare. They are confident that any incidents are dealt with swiftly and effectively by staff. Pupils told me that, 'Our headteacher does not allow bullying.'

Teachers make sure that pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe. Good relationships mean pupils have a trusted adult in whom they can confide any worries or concerns.

Parents, staff and pupils agree pupils are well cared for and safe.

### **Inspection findings**

- My first line of enquiry for the inspection looked at whether the local governing body provides an appropriate balance of support and challenge and so expedites the school's improvement. The local governing body has kept a close eye on the school's performance. Governors have made sure that there has been a relentless focus on pupils' performance, despite turbulence as the school has moved from one trust to another. The governors gather a wealth of evidence to reassure themselves about the school's effectiveness. They make frequent visits to school, talking to staff and pupils as well as scrutinising reports from leaders. They do not shy away from challenging leaders when required. As a result, they expedite the school's improvement.
- My second line of enquiry considered whether leaders' actions to improve pupils' creativity and expression in writing had raised standards in this subject. Across school, teachers use high-quality texts to provide models for pupils' own writing. Teachers have selected texts which engage and enthuse all pupils, particularly boys. Pupils are making good use of their learning across the curriculum to produce high-quality pieces of writing. For example, Year 6 pupils used their historical knowledge of the early twentieth century to inspire their writing based on the poem, 'The highwayman'. In Year 4, pupils drew on their learning in science to write accurate explanations about how sound travels. This increased enthusiasm for writing has improved standards across the school. More pupils are working at and above the standards expected for their age than previously.

- My third line of enquiry explored whether the school's curriculum provides sufficient opportunities for pupils to develop their skills and deepen their knowledge across a range of subjects. Since the previous inspection, leaders have focused on developing a curriculum which provides pupils with essential knowledge across a range of subjects. They have given thought to the balance of topic and subject-specific teaching. Over time, senior leaders and subject leaders have refined and improved the school's curriculum plans so that they include that knowledge that they determine to be essential for their pupils. They have made sure that curriculum plans map out the progression of knowledge in each subject, across the year groups, so pupils build on what they already know. Finally, they have made sure that teachers have the subject knowledge to teach effectively. While leaders have made much progress in devising the curriculum, there is still more work to do. Leaders are not yet fully confident that learning across the curriculum is sequenced effectively over time.
- My fourth line of enquiry questioned whether pupils' achievement has raised because teachers provide tasks which require sustained concentration and perseverance. Pupils at Dukesgate love learning. They enjoy wrestling with tricky problems in mathematics, discussing challenging texts in guided reading and explaining scientific concepts. Teachers set tasks which deepen pupils' learning across the curriculum. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning. Pupils are motivated, determined and proactive in their learning. Consequently, pupils embrace the more-challenging tasks their teachers set them so that more pupils are reaching high standards and greater depth than previously.
- During my visit I also considered the academic performance of White British boys, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This group have lagged behind other groups in the past, particularly at the end of key stage 2. Most of this group are now achieving in line with their peers. A small minority of these boys, having joined the school mid-phase or lagged behind previously, are working below the standards expected for their age. Leaders and teachers are aware of all these pupils and have put actions in place to help them catch up. Most of this group are on track to catch up by end of the key stage.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they continue to raise standards across the school by continuing to :

- develop the school's approach to assessment in subjects other than English and mathematics, so that it provides leaders and teachers with the information they need about pupils' learning
- further refine and improve curriculum design to make sure that learning across the curriculum is sequenced effectively over time.

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

Yours sincerely

Pippa Jackson Maitland  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you, senior leaders, teaching and support staff, and the chair and members of the local governing body. I also spoke to a representative of the multi-academy trust. I considered the 10 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. I met formally with a group of staff and considered the seven responses to Ofsted's online survey of staff. There were no responses to Ofsted's online survey of pupils. I talked informally to pupils throughout the school day and met formally with a group of pupils.

I visited classrooms and checked on pupils' work, both in books and on wall displays. I looked at information about pupils' progress and attainment, and the school's self-evaluation and action plan, as well as a range of other documentation.

I conducted a review of safeguarding, including an evaluation of the school's policies and procedures to keep pupils safe, training, recruitment checks and record-keeping.