

Inspection of Victoria Lane Academy

Victoria Lane, Coundon, Bishop Auckland, County Durham DL14 8NN

Inspection dates: 7 and 8 February 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Early years provision	Good
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Previous inspection grade	Good
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The acting head of school is Heather Whitfield. This school is part of Tudhoe Learning Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Jim Smith, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Ivan Whitfield. There is also an executive headteacher, Tracy Dodds, who is responsible for this school and one other.

What is it like to attend this school?

At Victoria Lane Academy, staff know pupils extremely well. There is a strong sense of community. Pupils are nurtured and very well cared for. As one pupil told inspectors, 'It's like being part of a family.' Pupils enjoy warm and happy relationships with their teachers. They work hard in lessons. Parents praise the school for the high levels of care and support their children receive.

The curriculum is broad, well planned and clearly sequenced. The school has thought carefully about what pupils need to know. Pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are given the support they need in lessons. Pupils achieve well.

The school is calm and orderly. School routines are well embedded and followed by all pupils. Pupils are motivated by the house points they receive in recognition of their achievements. Bullying sometimes happens. Teachers resolve these issues quickly and efficiently.

There are opportunities for pupils to develop their leadership skills. For example, pupils become sports ambassadors, members of the school council and/or house captains. Pupils also benefit from attending the range of extra-curricular clubs, including performing arts, cookery and a range of sports.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Pupils, including those with SEND, benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum. The school's curriculum plans are embedded and reviewed regularly. Teachers are clear about the knowledge that pupils need to learn and the order that it should be taught. For example, key stage 2 pupils completed a scientific investigation on the impact of exercise on the heart. To do this, pupils successfully drew on their detailed prior knowledge of the heart and its functions. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and provide clear explanations. The tasks pupils complete in lessons are well chosen.

Assessment is embedded into the curriculum. Teachers use this information to check what pupils know and remember. The needs of pupils with SEND are well met. This is because teachers have received a wealth of training, including recent training on supporting pupils with autism and managing complex needs. They adapt the curriculum appropriately. As a result of effective teaching, by the end of key stage 2, pupils are prepared well for their future learning.

Reading is a priority at the school. Children are exposed to sounds and language from the moment that they join school. Staff are well trained in the teaching of early reading. Phonics lessons are delivered effectively. They help children to learn, step by step, the sounds that letters make. Younger pupils read books that help them to build their confidence and accuracy in reading appropriately. The school implements a range of successful strategies to assess pupils' reading. Staff provide support for

pupils who need extra help to learn to read. Pupils continue to read regularly in key stage 2. They read a wide range of stories and genres for pleasure. Pupils benefit from a weekly assembly that is dedicated to the celebration of reading and learning about a wide range of authors.

The school has high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Most pupils behave well in lessons and engage enthusiastically in their learning. Playtime is a hive of activity as pupils play purposefully and cooperatively. Too many pupils are absent from school too often. The school recognises that improving this is a priority. The school has begun to take action to address this. However, the school does not have effective systems in place to track and identify the barriers to attendance that some pupils face.

Children in the early years benefit from well-designed opportunities to play, explore and learn with adults. The school ensures that children develop early mathematical and reading skills as the foundations for their learning. Children form friendships and play happily together. Effective modelling of language and communication by adults is helping children to become confident speakers.

Pupils are taught a comprehensive personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum. As part of this, pupils learn how to keep safe online, enjoy healthy relationships and live healthy lives. The school teaches pupils about tolerance. As such, pupils understand and celebrate the differences in other people. However, pupils are offered limited experiences beyond the classroom, such as trips and visits to explore the wider world.

Leaders at all levels are passionate about providing pupils at the school with a high-quality education so that they have the best life chances. Trustees and governors fulfil their statutory duties and hold school leaders to account. Leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas that require further development. Staff at the school are very well supported by leaders with their well-being and workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school does not analyse and address pupils' irregular attendance incisively enough. As a result, pupils' rates of absence and persistent absence are too high. These pupils miss too much learning. The school must ensure that there are systems in place to quickly identify and address the barriers to pupils' non-attendance.

- The school offers limited opportunities for pupils' cultural development. As a result, this is limiting pupils' understanding and experience of the wider world. The school must extend the curriculum to enrich pupils' cultural development to support them to become knowledgeable, understanding and responsible citizens.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	138555
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10297372
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	171
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Ivan Whitfield
CEO of the trust	Jim Smith
Headteacher	Tracy Dodds (Executive Headteacher)
Website	www.victorialaneacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	19 September 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act

Information about this school

- The school is part of Tudhoe Learning Trust.
- The school makes use of one registered alternative provision.
- The school runs wrap-around care before and after school.
- The current executive headteacher and acting head of school have been in post since September 2023.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the

school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors spoke with the executive headteacher, the acting head of school, other leaders and trust leaders about the school's progress since the last inspection.
- To evaluate the quality of education, inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and science. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspectors also discussed the curriculum and looked at pupils' work in art and history.
- Inspectors spoke to pupil groups and to individual pupils around the school about behaviour and their experience of being in school. The inspectors also observed breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors discussed the PSHE curriculum with leaders and spoke to pupils about how this curriculum and associated experiences support their understanding.
- Inspectors evaluated the responses to the online parent, pupil and staff surveys.

Inspection team

Dan McKeating, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Nicola Beaumont

His Majesty's Inspector

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