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Helen Bye
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Dear Miss Bye

Short inspection of Scientia Academy

Following my visit to the school on 2 May 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 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You were appointed as headteacher in April 2019. Prior to your appointment, the deputy headteacher had been the acting headteacher for two terms. There are three new middle leaders and there is a new chair of governors. Since 2015, the number of pupils who attend the academy has nearly doubled and there are now two classes in every year group.

You and your leaders have focused on ensuring that the school motto of 'creating the future' is a key part of your vision. This has led to initiatives such as 'Eleven Before Eleven', which provide pupils with a range of opportunities that they are able to participate in before they leave the school. As a result, pupils' learning experiences are enriched by activities such as 'camping under the stars' and a residential visit to Paris.

Pupils understand the school values of 'sagacity, integrity and achievement' and they are proud of the weekly award assembly which rewards their success in following these values. Your staff also embody and reinforce the importance of these values to pupils and this has led to positive and fruitful relationships between staff and pupils. As a consequence, pupils' conduct in lessons and around school at breaktimes and lunchtime is exemplary. Pupils are polite, friendly and respectful to adults and their peers. Pupils' attitude to learning was positive in all lessons we visited.

Leaders have accurately identified the strengths and areas for development and this is reflected in your school improvement plan. As a result, you and your leaders have implemented new initiatives that are starting to make a difference to the areas that you and your leaders have correctly prioritised. However, you do acknowledge that some developments are yet to be fully embedded. For example, the introduction of a new way to teach reading skills in the classroom, using more challenging texts, needs further time to

demonstrate impact for all pupils.

Parents and carers are very positive about the school, as they showed in their responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, where the vast majority said that they would recommend the school. One parent commented: 'My two children are attending this school and I would recommend Scientia Academy to every parent. I can see my children's learning progress day by day.'

Staff indicated in their survey that they enjoy working at Scientia and they feel well supported by leaders. Middle leaders value the opportunities they have had to improve their leadership skills through access to a range of professional development opportunities. As a result, your middle leaders have improved their understanding of their areas of responsibility and they have a clear idea of their next priorities.

Governors have a sound knowledge of the school and can identify the areas which need to improve. Governors' knowledge is supported through the receipt of reports of external reviews of the school. Recent governor actions have led to more detailed records of governor meetings, which now show improvements in their challenge to leaders. However, some reports and improvement plans lack enough detail to allow governors to make a necessary challenge.

Areas for improvement raised at the previous inspection have been addressed. Your leaders have implemented a whole-school mathematics approach that has led to increased challenge within lessons. Pupils now use number skills more effectively and as a result outcomes in mathematics have improved. In the early years, the ongoing development and effective use of an outdoor area has enabled children's physical skills to improve. In addition, training for staff has ensured that teachers reshape tasks when pupils have mastered skills.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders responsible for safeguarding have superbly organised records of training and as a result, all staff have received up-to-date and relevant training. Leaders use stringent checklists to ensure that nothing is overlooked when recruiting staff and the record of pre-appointment checks is meticulous.

All staff are familiar with the school's electronic system for recording concerns about pupils, and leaders ensure that records are quality-assured through regular meetings. The school's system shows that when a risk to pupils occurs, leaders support and work alongside parents and other agencies to protect the pupils. The culture of safeguarding and the organisation of systems to support this culture is a strength of the school.

Pupils feel safe and happy at school and said that it was 'OK to be different'. Pupils commented that bullying does not happen, and name-calling is very rare. They feel confident that if they were to have any worries or concerns, staff would resolve issues quickly and supportively. Pupils value their opportunities of responsibility as school councillors and prefects.

Inspection findings

- In 2018, at the end of key stage 2, attainment in reading, writing and mathematics was in line with the national average. In the same period, the amount of progress made by pupils at the end of key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics was average when compared to national outcomes. However, the progress made by pupils in reading and writing was relatively weaker than that made in mathematics in 2018. Attainment of pupils at the end of key stage 1 in 2018 was also relatively stronger for mathematics, compared to reading and writing.
- Leaders have introduced numerous initiatives to improve reading and writing outcomes since September 2018. Changes to the organisation of the guided reading lessons have given pupils greater opportunity to access challenging texts. This has supported pupils' language acquisition effectively and allowed pupils to practise and develop more complex reading skills. Your initiatives to promote reading for pleasure have been successful. The award of badges to recognise when pupils have read 30 books has led to an increase in the number of books read by individual pupils. Pupils are equally enthusiastic about the '100 books to read before you leave' initiative, which has led to an increase in the range of texts read by pupils.
- Leaders have ensured that pupils have the opportunity to write in different subjects in addition to English, in order to further embed their writing skills. Newly introduced independent writing tasks allow teachers to identify the gaps in pupils' knowledge. Teachers use this information effectively to provide appropriate support and guidance to pupils, which coupled with an improved consistency in teaching approaches, have led to increased rates of progress. However, initiatives in reading and writing require further time to be embedded across the school.
- In 2018, there was a much lower proportion of boys achieving expected standards at the end of early years, compared to girls. Leaders have identified why some boys attained lower outcomes. For example, some boys' progress slowed because of their lack of engagement at the start of the year. Leaders responded effectively and instigated a number of initiatives including a nurture group, topics such as 'dinosaurs' and the use of outdoor learning to engage boys further. These initiatives have contributed to recent improvements in boys' progress.
- I also reviewed the performance of disadvantaged pupils due to a lower proportion of pupils reaching expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1 compared to the national proportion for other pupils. Leaders have used assessment information to focus interventions in certain year groups. For example, the 'Prince William Award' has been implemented to improve the learning behaviours of pupils through the development of their resilience. The 'nurture' double decker bus also provides a warm and welcoming environment for the family liaison officer to work with pupils and families. Although these and other initiatives are improving the progress made, there are disadvantaged pupils in some year groups who are not making good enough progress to address the existing gaps in their knowledge. Leaders ensure that pupil premium funding is clearly accounted for within their plans. However, some targets lack focused measurable outcomes and this prevents leaders from identifying the specific impact they are having on improving pupils' outcomes and taking further action if needs be.
- Leaders' self-evaluation has accurately identified the key priorities for improvement. However, here again, there is a lack of detail in numerous leadership documents. The

aims outlined in school documents and action plans are too broad in places and lack the precision needed to ensure that improvements can be monitored accurately and action taken if required.

- The wider curriculum has been designed in consultation with pupils and staff. It provides pupils with a range of enjoyable and interesting lessons that deepen their knowledge and skills in a broad range of subjects. Leaders have carefully sequenced learning to deepen pupils' understanding of topics. For example, in geography there is a progression in the complexity of maps that are studied, ranging from the local environment in Year 2 to counties in Year 6. As a result, pupils make strong progress in a range of subjects across the curriculum, such as geography and history. Leaders ensure that the curriculum is enriched by numerous activities, including trips and engagement days where new topics are introduced through special events. Pupils have the opportunity to learn to play an instrument, with assessments by the London College of Music.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to embed the initiatives for reading and writing, so that achievement in these subjects matches that of mathematics in key stages 1 and 2
- they make use of measurable targets and milestones when planning for improvement for both the whole-school and pupil premium spending so that they can judge whether their actions have been successful
- the differences in outcomes between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils continue to diminish in all year groups.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Cadwallader
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, a number of middle leaders, the regional and deputy directors of the academy trust and the chair of the governing body. I spoke to parents at the beginning of the school day and considered the 79 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including the 67 written comments. I also considered the 37 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. I scrutinised a range of school documentation including the single central record for safeguarding, the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, the minutes of governing body meetings and safeguarding information. I visited classrooms with you, the deputy headteacher and the

regional director. I looked at pupils' work in reading and writing. I also reviewed some examples of work from the wider curriculum and early years alongside the leaders for these areas. I spoke to pupils at breaktimes, lunchtime and in lessons.