

Victoria Lane Academy

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

Inspection dates

14–15 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. They reach standards that are above average in reading and average in mathematics by the time they leave at the end of Year 6. Standards in writing are improving.
- The quality of teaching is good. Teachers plan interesting activities with care and precision so that pupils are very clear about what is expected and how to make good progress.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make outstanding progress in their personal and social skills, so that their behaviour is exemplary. This is because adults create exceptionally stimulating learning activities and constantly praise and encourage the very best behaviour.
- Pupils are courteous and well behaved. They treat adults and their peers with respect. As a result, bullying incidents are rare and when they do happen pupils say they are dealt with very quickly.
- There is a warm and positive atmosphere throughout the school so that pupils enjoy working in a happy, safe environment. Parents have high levels of confidence in the headteacher and other staff.
- Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has created and inspired a climate where everyone wants to succeed. Actions are improving teaching and achievement. All leaders, including governors, share the headteacher's high aspirations for pupils. The leaders' clear view of what still needs to be done and the pupils' good progress ensure the school will continue to improve.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Standards in writing are not high enough because grammar is not taught well enough and pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to write at length.
- Pupils do not always have enough opportunities to correct or improve their work in order to make even better progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 11 lessons taught by seven teachers as well as reviewing pupils' work. Some observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors talked to pupils at break and lunch times, and heard others in Year 1, Year 2 and Year 6 read.
- The views of 16 parents who responded to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) were taken into account, as well as the views of parents gained informally at the start and end of the school day.
- Inspectors met with senior and middle leaders, teachers, members of the governing body, members of the board of directors and a representative of the local authority.
- The school's improvement plan and records of pupils' achievement, records of the quality of teaching, pupils' behaviour and safeguarding were examined.
- Twenty-five staff submitted their views via a questionnaire and inspectors took these into account.

Inspection team

Christine Cottam, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Kathleen Mullen

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school became an Academy on 1st December 2012. It is sponsored by Tudhoe Colliery Primary School.
- Both schools are members of Tudhoe Learning Trust, a partnership of four primary schools led by an executive headteacher, who is also the headteacher of the sponsor school. The trust has a board of directors. Victoria Lane Academy also has its own governing body and headteacher, appointed in January 2013.
- Victoria Lane Academy is smaller than the average sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for support through the pupil premium is higher than average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage and speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is higher than the national average as is the proportion supported school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard, which is the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics at the end of Year 6.
- The school has Healthy School status and has achieved the silver Activemark.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards in writing and increase the proportion of pupils reaching average and above average levels by:
 - improving the quality of pupils' handwriting and presentation
 - helping pupils to use the correct grammar and punctuation appropriate to their age and ability
 - extending pupils' vocabulary and their ability to use complex sentences through providing opportunities for them to write at greater length.
- Improve the effectiveness of marking and feedback by ensuring that pupils have enough opportunities to correct or improve their work in order to make more rapid progress.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Pupils make good progress from their starting points because close checks are kept on pupils' progress and tasks set an appropriately challenging level.
- Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and abilities that are well below those typically found for their age. Recent improvements to teaching ensure children are now making good progress, so that the majority have acquired the skills they need to get off to a flying start in Year 1.
- Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 1. They reach broadly average standards in reading and mathematics. Standards are a little lower in writing because no pupils are reaching higher than average levels.
- This good progress continues throughout Key Stage 2 so that pupils reach standards that are above average in reading and average in mathematics. Again, standards in writing are slightly lower.
- Pupils make good progress in reading. By the time they leave Year 6 all pupils have reached the standard expected for their age and about a third have reached a higher level. This is because reading is taught well throughout the school. Younger pupils are making good progress learning letters and sounds, while older pupils read fluently, and discuss authors and the types of books they prefer to read.
- Achievement in writing is improving so that a greater proportion of pupils are reaching average levels for their age. Not enough pupils are reaching higher levels because handwriting, presentation and basic grammar need to improve. Pupils do not have enough opportunities to use complex sentences or write more extensively.
- Pupils make good progress in mathematics. They calculate accurately and use their number skills to solve problems. There are good opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills in other subjects, most notably in science.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress. This is because teachers set work at an appropriately challenging level and then make sure pupils are supported well in order to achieve.
- Pupils supported by the pupil premium make good progress. This group includes those known to be eligible for free school meals. There is a small gap in attainment at the end of Year 2 and eligible pupils are approximately a term behind their peers in the school. However, by the end of Year 6, there is no such gap with eligible pupils matching the standards reached by their peers. This improvement shows that the school's leaders are using additional funding well to ensure equality of opportunity.
- The most able pupils make good progress because they are set work that is more challenging and reflects their ability, particularly in reading and mathematics.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching is effective and activities inspire and motivate pupils. For example, children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are extremely curious about the recently hatched chicks in their classroom. They explain the hatching process of chicks and how to care for them.
- New work is carefully explained so that pupils understand what they have to do and also the standards they are expected to reach. Pupils' understanding of what they are to do and learn deepens during effective question-and-answer sessions. Pupils answer questions enthusiastically because they are interested and want to share their knowledge.
- Teaching assistants are knowledgeable and confident. They are deployed effectively so that they make a good contribution to pupils' progress. For example, teaching assistants successfully teach 'letters and sounds' to their own groups of pupils on a daily basis.
- Pupils' understanding is assessed regularly and accurately. This information is used well to set

work that is sufficiently challenging for different groups of pupils.

- Pupils enjoy writing because they often work on unusual activities that fire their imagination. For example, Year 6 pupils enjoyed the challenge of writing fictional letters to other schools to persuade them to go to 'Hansel and Gretel's' cottage in the woods. However, pupils are not yet reaching above average standards because grammar is not taught systematically and pupils do not receive enough opportunities to express their ideas using more complex sentences.
- Teachers mark pupils' work systematically and point out how their work could be improved. Pupils have targets which set out what they need to be able to do in their writing and mathematics in order to reach the next level. Sometimes, pupils have opportunities to return to their work to improve or correct it, but this is not consistently the case.
- Pupils have good homework opportunities that help them with their English and mathematics skills. For example, they have on-line access to reading books and mathematics practice that they particularly enjoy.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are polite and friendly towards adults and each other. This is because adults nurture respectful relationships and are consistently firm and fair. Pupils speak highly of their school and say one of the best things is how well their teachers treat them. One boy who had been to two other schools said, 'teachers don't shout at children here'. Pupils are thriving in this well-ordered, happy atmosphere.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are positive. They work hard in lessons and want to do their best. This helps them to make good progress.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make very rapid progress in the development of their personal and social skills. They show high levels of curiosity in the many varied and interesting learning activities that are provided for them and will happily concentrate for long periods of time, considering their age.
- Leaders check on pupils' behaviour over time and provide additional support where pupils experience difficulty conforming to the rules and routines. There have been a small number of exclusions since the school opened, but these have decreased because pupils with additional needs are managed so well. As a result, learning is rarely disrupted in lessons.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils have a good knowledge of how to stay safe in a variety of situations, for example on the internet, crossing the road and near open water. Pupils say that bullying hardly ever happens, but when it does it is sorted out very quickly so that it stops.
- Parents are unanimous in their view that their children enjoy coming to school and feel safe. Parents say that the school manages behaviour well and they have no concerns about bullying.
- Attendance has improved and is now broadly average.

The leadership and management are good

- The new headteacher has inspired the trust and confidence of parents, pupils and staff. She is knowledgeable, efficient and approachable.
- The headteacher and executive headteacher work extremely well together as a dynamic force with a vision for the very highest standards for pupils. Their ambition and drive is shared by all who work in the school. Staff and parents are unanimous in their view that the school is doing exceptionally well under this leadership.
- Leaders have an accurate picture of how well the school is performing and improvement priorities are set out in clear plans in order to tackle any underperformance. This is because leaders check the progress of pupils regularly and use this information to hold teachers to account.
- They also check the quality of teaching and work in pupils' books and then provide accurate

feedback to help teachers to improve. This information is used well to manage the performance of teachers and ensure pay is commensurate with that of performance. As a result, the quality of teaching has improved so that it is good and sometimes better.

- The Trust is having a significant impact on improvements in the school. The expertise of staff is developed across the Trust so that the best examples of performance are shared. For example, the middle leaders from all four schools are taking part in leadership training together. The Trust is able to recruit high calibre teaching staff through its links with a local university.
- Middle leaders are knowledgeable and ambitious. They receive good support from senior leaders and have an equally strong understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of achievement and teaching.
- The curriculum has a bias towards English and mathematics and this is helping to raise standards. However, pupils have good opportunities to apply their skills in other subjects, such as science. There are extensive opportunities for pupils to enjoy additional activities, including visits out of school, which are widening pupils' horizons and helping them to develop good spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness.
- The primary school sport funding has been used effectively to extend the range of sports on offer. Specialist coaches, for example in gymnastics and dance, work alongside teachers. Teachers report that their skills and confidence have increased as a result. Pupils say they enjoy the increased sports competitions that are now provided.
- The school is a caring, safe environment where safeguarding practices meet statutory requirements.
- The local authority provides effective support through a school improvement professional who visits the school regularly and provides high quality reports to the governing body.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors bring a range of individual skills that are used effectively to support the school. For example, one has a health and safety background and another works in school improvement. Governors visit the school regularly during the school day and also ask challenging questions during meetings.
 - As a result, governors are knowledgeable about achievement, safety and the quality of teaching. They use information well to reward good teaching. Successful action has been taken in the recent past to tackle underperformance so that teaching is now consistently good.
 - The Chair of the Governing Body and executive headteacher are both directors of the Tudhoe Learning Trust. This is ensuring good communication between the governing body and the Trust.
 - Governors ensure resources such as the pupil premium funding are used effectively. They review data and ask questions about any gaps in pupils' performance. They have ensured action has been taken so that any gap in achievement between eligible pupils and their classmates has closed by the time pupils leave Year 6.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors. A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.

School details

Unique reference number	138555
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	440098

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	152
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Bowes
Headteacher	Jane Richardson
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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