

Ref: SIF/LOM/L:AdminTeam/PrincipalLetters/Ofsted/Nov16

18th November 2016

Dear Parent/Carer

The Discovery Academy Ofsted Inspection

As you may be aware, The Discovery Academy was inspected by Ofsted on the 5th and 6th October 2016. This inspection was crucial to the Academy as it provided a full evaluation on the Academy's improvement since it was placed in a category of serious weaknesses in January 2015. Parents and carers will be aware that the Academy has suffered with many legacy issues from its inception, which the Academy now feels are being addressed.

It gives me great pleasure to inform you that Ofsted have now judged the Academy to no longer require significant improvement. The Ofsted report states "Leaders have created a positive ethos, have identified the right priorities and are tackling weaknesses robustly. As a result, the school is improving".

From the four areas Ofsted evaluated, three have been judged as good:

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| • Effectiveness of leadership and management | Good |
| • Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Good |
| • Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Good |

This evaluation is a real credit to the standards our students and staff now achieve. Inspectors were impressed by the confidence and positive attitude of our students and they noted the inclusive nature working within the Academy. Staff were also identified as skilled, experienced and specialist teachers who work together to develop good practice. The mission of "expect excellence" was seen consistently around the Academy and it is certainly supporting high expectations and greater ambition.

Due to legacy issues from previous years, the outcomes students achieve require improvement. Ofsted did recognise the improving trend in results but evaluated progress was not strong enough for students who have now left the Academy because of weaker teaching in the past. Securing good outcomes this year is a key priority for the Academy. We are confident that as current students benefit from good teaching and a continued drive to achieve the very best, results will rise and compare favourably this year to other schools nationally. Overall effectiveness has moved up a judgment from the previous inspection and when outcomes are secured as good we expect the overall effectiveness to match the good judgements in teaching, behaviour and leadership.

The full report is available on our Academy website at www.thediscoveryacademy.co.uk for parents and carers to read. I would ask everybody to read this report and make their own judgment. We feel very proud of the improving picture and the good judgments now being secured for the community we serve. The work however does not stop, and our ambition to become an outstanding academy in three years is unwavering. This Ofsted evaluation provides the perfect stepping stone for that aim to become a reality.

Yours faithfully
Mr S French
Principal

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Inspection dates

5–6 October 2016

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Require improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Although pupils' progress is improving as a result of better teaching, pupils do not make the progress they should by the end of Year 11. This is because of weaker teaching in the past.
- Disadvantaged pupils have not achieved well enough. While this is improving as a result of leaders' decisive actions, these pupils' outcomes are not yet good.
- There is some variability between how well pupils achieve in different subjects. They do better in science than in English and mathematics.
- Leaders' approach to developing pupils' numeracy skills across all subjects is inconsistent.
- The proportions of pupils who are absent and regularly absent, although reducing rapidly, are above the national averages.
- Teachers do not consistently implement the school's systems to continue the improvements in learning and assessment.
- Leaders have improved certain aspects of the school quickly but there has not yet been enough time for all actions to be fully effective.

The school has the following strengths

- Particularly since the appointment of the new principal and vice-principal, leaders have created a positive ethos, have identified the right priorities and are tackling weaknesses robustly. As a result, the school is improving.
- The quality of teaching and the curriculum have improved significantly. Both suit the needs of pupils and accelerate their progress.
- Pupils have good attitudes to learning. They are good ambassadors for the school.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities show improving progress.
- The progress of the most able pupils is carefully tracked and monitored. They are increasingly challenged with extra opportunities in science, technology, mathematics and engineering.
- Governors are relentless in their drive for higher standards. Their support and challenge are effective in improving current standards.
- Many of the pupils who spoke to inspectors were complimentary about the careers information and advice they receive from teachers and specialist advisers.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the outcomes for all groups of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, so that they make at least good progress from their starting points by ensuring that:
 - leaders check that teachers routinely implement the school's assessment system
 - leaders tackle and reduce variations in the quality of provision in the small number of subjects that are less effective
 - leaders focus on precise improvement planning to ensure high levels of consistency and even greater accountability across the school
 - teachers adopt a uniform approach to developing pupils' numeracy skills across all subjects.
- Continue to take steps to reduce absence, and particularly the number of pupils who are regularly absent, to ensure that overall attendance of pupils is closer to the national average by:
 - evaluating and building on those strategies that have improved attendance over recent years
 - ensuring that parents are fully aware that continued absence detrimentally affects their children's outcomes and life chances, and that pupils have a similar understanding.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The principal, who was appointed less than a year ago, communicates a clear sense of purpose with urgency. The mission 'expect excellence' is seen consistently around the school and is referred to by pupils, staff and leaders.
- Leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of the school and have great ambition for what pupils can achieve. This includes academic success, a focus on positive conduct and pupils contributing to the life of the school and the wider community.
- There is a clear sense of equality and inclusion in the school. Diversity is recognised and valued. This encourages harmony in the community in which the school is located and in the wider area. Pupils told inspectors, 'Everybody is welcome here'.
- Leaders' more effective use of the pupil premium has strengthened the provision for disadvantaged pupils. Their progress is tracked and monitored more effectively than previously and teachers are held more rigorously to account for these pupils' achievement. As a result, outcomes are improving and the large variances between these pupils and others nationally are now diminishing.
- The school's curriculum has been improved and is broad, balanced and relevant. The curriculum has been adapted in order to meet leaders' greater ambition for pupils and to address the range of abilities within the school, including the most able pupils. Subjects contributing toward the English Baccalaureate are now being widely offered, with a particular focus on more pupils studying modern foreign languages.
- Pupils participate in extra-curricular activities such as sport and a choir. There are also opportunities to complete schoolwork with teachers, particularly in the run-up to examinations. Pupils visit the library at the end of the day to do homework and continue their reading programmes in a supervised setting. These have contributed to recently improved outcomes across the school, including in reading.
- Teachers' performance is managed rigorously. They are rewarded for their contribution when merited and leaders also increasingly hold teachers to account where necessary.
- Middle leaders told inspectors how clear line-management within the school allows for good communication and a professional approach to quality assurance. These leaders feel that systems to monitor teaching and work in books and folders are increasingly effective. Inspectors saw evidence that supports this view.
- The core subjects of English and mathematics now have stronger leadership. The departments work together and with science. Greater consistency was seen in planning and teaching as a result of this.
- Leaders giving pastoral support to pupils provided inspectors with compelling evidence of how their work helps improve pupils' progress. They recognise that absence and achievement are directly related. This is the message increasingly given to pupils and parents. It is seen as one of the strategies that led to improvements in attendance following the last inspection. Leaders accept that they need to do even more here for some pupils and their families.
- As a result of leaders' work, higher-quality learning and outcomes are now apparent for pupils in the school across all year groups. This is increasingly the case for

disadvantaged pupils and the most able, who are now making better progress towards standards reached by pupils with similar starting points nationally. Leaders know that these improvements have to be sustained and they have strategies in place to do so.

- The most effective departments have systematic approaches to assessment. Written feedback promotes learning and progress over time.
- Leaders have a good grasp of the school's overall strengths and priorities for further development. Improvement measures have not always been sharp or precise enough, however, for leaders to ensure consistency and to hold teams to account.
- Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. They were given the opportunity to participate in a democratic process, and to learn about institutions which have an impact on their lives, in the school's recent referendum on membership of the European Union.
- The promotion of pupils' literacy skills has improved. Pupils benefit from a good range of opportunities to extend their reading and writing skills across subjects. More pupils are now making better progress as a result. Opportunities to extend pupils' numeracy skills, however, are still sometimes overlooked.
- Pupils could tell inspectors their ambitions for the future and which qualifications were necessary in order to reach the next stage. Their ability to discuss these aspects is a result of good-quality careers education and guidance.

Governance of the school

- The governing body is effective. It is ambitious and enthusiastic about improvements seen within the school. These include more effective teachers, higher attendance, improved pupil behaviour and community involvement.
- Governors carry out their statutory duties with diligence. They have overseen the performance management system, rewarding staff for making a good difference across the range of their roles. Governors are also aware that pay progression has been withheld because of poor performance.
- Governors have acted decisively on the findings of the previous inspection. They now know about the effectiveness of pupil premium funding in improving attendance and behaviour for some pupils.
- Governors put considerable energy into appropriate involvement in the school as part of their strategic oversight. There are, for example, links with subject areas, and meetings with pupils and parents. These activities allow governors to know the school well and help them provide good support as well as challenge to leaders.
- There is a culture of self-evaluation within the governing body. This is seen with their commissioning of external advice on key areas for improvement, such as the quality of teaching, the impact of pupil premium spending and provision in mathematics. There has recently been a review of the governing body's effectiveness. Governors told inspectors that this would help shape further developments.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The well-being and safety of pupils are given the highest priority.
- Policies meet all statutory requirements and are reviewed regularly. They are understood and implemented.
- The school's record of recruitment and vetting checks is administered robustly. It contains details of relevant training, including that related to safer recruitment. The governor responsible for safeguarding has routine oversight of these procedures.

- Pupils are aware that they can pass on any worries and say that they will be dealt with. This includes a 'help button' on the computer network system which allows concerns to be raised privately.
- Leaders work with a wide and comprehensive range of outside agencies and this contributes to the school being a vigilant and safe learning environment.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Since the last inspection, and particularly recently, leaders have successfully addressed previously weak teaching. The appointment of skilled, experienced and specialist teachers, coupled with extensive training, supports the sharing of good practice among staff. This has strengthened the quality of teaching. Pupils' outcomes are still making up lost ground due to previously weaker teaching. Nonetheless, the quality of teaching is now good and, as a result, differences in achievement, including between groups of pupils, are diminishing rapidly.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge. They use their expertise to inform their planning of lessons and to shape tasks that challenge pupils to deepen and extend their knowledge, skills and understanding. This includes stretching the learning of the most able pupils. Good-quality questioning, which requires pupils to expand on and clarify their answers, is clearly evident.
- Positive relationships between teachers and pupils foster good attitudes to learning. Classrooms are calm, purposeful and productive places in which to learn. Pupils work hard and conscientiously.
- Expectations of what most pupils can achieve are usually high. Pupils are expected to challenge themselves to excel. A clear focus is placed on making sure that the most able pupils can achieve well and have high aspirations for their future. This includes participating in a range of specialist challenge projects and enrichment opportunities.
- Leaders have been successful in improving how well pupils' learning is assessed. Through the school's new 'SWANS' (strengths, weakness and next steps) approach, many pupils are developing a good understanding of what they need to do to improve their learning by reinforcing their knowledge and skills. Sometimes, however, teachers do not adhere to the school's agreed approach to assessment and, as a result, some pupils are unclear about how to improve.
- The promotion of pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural education, and opportunities to learn about British values, are clearly planned and evident in many aspects of the school's work. In English, for example, pupils learn about the importance of democracy and laws. Displays around the school promote aspects of equality and participation.
- Teaching ensures that pupils know how to keep safe from radicalisation and understand that extremism can take many forms and cross social, ethnic and religious groups.
- Teaching assistants contribute effective support to the learning of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The achievement of this group of pupils, in most year groups, has accelerated at a good rate since the last inspection and outcomes improved for Year 11 in 2016 as a result.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- In lessons, pupils almost always display positive attitudes to learning. They apply themselves to tasks well, are attentive and respectful. Pupils listen carefully to their teachers and each other.
- Pupils' good attitudes are also reflected in their work, which was neatly presented in the majority of books seen.
- Inspectors saw social, personal and psychological well-being supported effectively within the school. This included within the 'Bridge' facility through which the school accesses a range of multi-agency support.
- Pupils feel safe, are safe and know how to keep themselves free from danger in a range of situations, including in relation to radicalisation and extremism. They are very clear about the roles and responsibilities of staff should problems arise. Furthermore, pupils are aware of their own responsibilities. One group of pupils told inspectors that they 'would not tolerate bullying'. Some pupils were proud to say that they had applied to become 'anti-bullying ambassadors'.
- A small number of pupils benefit from attending alternative provision instead of studying in the school. Staff responsible for these pupils ensure that effective systems are in place to support pupils behaving and attending well.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils understand how the school's expectations are aimed at enhancing their attitudes to learning.
- Pupils take a pride in their appearance and their school. They welcome visitors in a polite and mature way.
- Pupils' punctuality is good and they come prepared for their lessons. These positive aspects are the result of individual self-discipline and a robust in-class reporting system to which pupils respond well.
- Pupils with specific behavioural needs receive appropriate assistance from the pastoral and learning support teams. More positive attitudes to learning seen across the school are evidence of the effectiveness of additional support for pupils that require more extensive interventions.
- Attendance for all groups has improved over the past three years but is still below national levels. The proportion of pupils who are regularly absent remains above the national average. Leaders continue to place a strong emphasis on improving attendance. This includes the effective use of an education welfare officer through the College Academies Trust. Efforts have not yet, however, been fully effective. Some parents are not fully aware that continued absence detrimentally affects their children's outcomes and life chances.
- The good behaviour in the school is reflected in the decreasing level of fixed-term exclusions. There have been no permanent exclusions for the last three years. In discussions, pupils unanimously agree that behaviour is much improved.

Outcomes for pupils

Require improvement

- In the past, pupils' progress from their starting points has been slow as a result of weak teaching. In recent years, pupils have left the school at the end of Year 11 with levels of attainment that have been much lower than average. The good quality of teaching now evident is helping to turn this around. Pupils' levels of skills are now rising steadily and securely and progress is speeding up quickly. Despite this, pupils are still catching up lost ground and too few are making good progress from their previous starting points. Outcomes for pupils, therefore, still require improvement.
- While the proportion of pupils who made expected progress in English in the 2015 examinations matched that of pupils nationally, too many pupils did not make good progress from their different starting points across a number of subjects. These included mathematics and humanities. Science progress improved in 2015 while modern foreign languages declined. The school's analysis of outcomes in 2016 shows that progress in mathematics has improved.
- The school's assessment information shows that in 2016 there were improvements in pupils' outcomes. There were increases in the proportions of pupils who gained good grades and made progress in English and mathematics. Attainment improved in a number of other subjects, including art and physical education, and also the English Baccalaureate. Nevertheless, outcomes remain low and pupils did not make good progress from their different starting points.
- Historically, disadvantaged pupils in the school have done less well than other pupils nationally. Good teaching is beginning to see differences diminish, quite rapidly for current Year 11. Pupils in Years 8 and 9 who are disadvantaged are also making quicker progress.
- At the end of Year 11 in 2015, the most able pupils made slower progress than those with similar starting points nationally and leaders' analysis shows that this is likely to have continued in 2016. Effective teaching for these pupils is now characterised by higher expectations and more challenge. This, coupled with a more appropriate curriculum, is improving current outcomes for the most able pupils.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities showed improvements in progress and attendance in 2016. This group of pupils is currently doing less well in Year 10 across a number of subjects. The school is aware of this and is taking appropriate action to accelerate the progress of these pupils. In other year groups their skill development is stronger. However, overall these pupils' outcomes also require further improvement.
- A more effective, although relatively new, approach to assessment is driving up standards. Leaders have set more challenging targets for pupils to raise their aspirations and to ensure that teachers are planning learning that is challenging for all groups. Many teachers are using this information well. Leaders have identified that this is one area where there needs to be greater consistency.
- Some pupils join the school with low skills in reading, writing and mathematics. The Year 7 catch-up funding is directed toward these pupils. The school's information showed that these pupils are developing their skills and their progress is improving.
- There is a strong culture of reading across the school. Pupils read in tutor periods and also use the library with enthusiasm. All pupils take part in a structured reading programme. Inspectors were shown that pupils had made good gains in their reading

ages. Programmes directed at pupils' numeracy skill development have not yet had a positive influence.

- Pupils who attend alternative provision are monitored carefully in terms of their progress, personal development and welfare. Inspectors spoke to pupils who explained that they attended two organisations and both worked together effectively. The pupils felt supported in their aims for high outcomes.
- Good careers advice and guidance help pupils make the right choices. Activities across the curriculum develop personal skills and extend learning. Pupils' aspirations and ambitions have been raised. They are suitably equipped to proceed to the next stage of their education.

School details

Unique reference number	136681
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	10011696

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,011
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Pat Jackson
Principal	Simon French
Telephone number	01782 882 100
Website	http://www.thediscoveryacademy.co.uk/
Email address	academy@thediscoveryacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	14–15 January 2015

Information about this school

- Discovery Academy is larger than the average secondary school.
- It is part of the College Academies Trust sponsored by Stoke-on-Trent College.
- The principal joined the school in December 2015 and the vice-principal in January 2016.
- Most pupils attending the school are White British, with a much lower than average proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium is well above average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is lower than the national average.
- In 2015 the school met the government's floor standards, which set out the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress.

- The school places pupils who may require additional support at seven alternative providers: PEAK, Sporting Stars, Phoenix, ENCORE, NACRO, Stoke-on-Trent College and MERIT.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 35 lessons, some of which were observed jointly with senior leaders. A further 10 shorter visits to lessons were made by inspectors and senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked at a range of pupils' work across a number of subjects in both key stages 3 and 4.
- Meetings took place with the principal, senior leaders, subject leaders and groups of pupils from across all years. The lead inspector met with four members of the governing body, including a representative of the College Academies Trust. The lead inspector also spoke to members of the canteen and cleaning staff.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at the start of the day, at break, lunchtime, between lessons and after school. Inspectors also observed pupils in an assembly, tutor time and in the library.
- Inspectors took into account the views of 47 pupil responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire.
- Inspectors took into account the views of 21 parental responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, and 17 free text messages. The school's own analysis of parental feedback was also scrutinised.
- Inspectors took into account the views of 65 members of staff who responded to the questionnaire.
- Inspectors looked at a variety of documentation. This included the school's self-evaluation of its provision, its short-term development planning and long-term ambitions. Inspectors also considered information relating to outcomes, teaching and learning, behaviour and attendance, safeguarding and governance.

Inspection team

Nigel Griffiths, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Stephen Lunt	Ofsted Inspector
Melanie Callaghan-Lewis	Ofsted Inspector
Karen Lockett	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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