

The Victory Academy

Magpie Hall Road, Chatham, Kent ME4 5JB

Inspection dates

26–27 September 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- This is a rapidly improving school, due to strong leadership and effective support from the Thinking Schools Academy Trust (TSAT).
- The principal has clear vision, determination and a sense of direction. She has led the change towards a positive ethos and culture of learning throughout the school.
- Senior and middle leadership is strong. Staff strongly support the leaders' vision to promote the achievement and well-being of every pupil. Staff and pupils are proud of the school.
- Leaders are ambitious for the school and its pupils. They make frequent checks on the progress that pupils make. They ensure that effective interventions are in place for pupils who need extra help to catch up.
- Teaching is improving and is now good. Teachers show secure subject knowledge and use questions to encourage pupils to explain their thinking. A focus on literacy across all subjects helps pupils express their ideas accurately.
- Achievement has risen over the last three years. Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are making good progress in most subjects.
- Safeguarding is a real strength of the school. Vulnerable pupils benefit from timely and effective support when required.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. Pastoral leaders know their pupils well. Strong relationships between staff and pupils help pupils feel secure and promote their personal development well.
- Governors and officers from TSAT have enabled successful recruitment, effective training and retention of high-quality staff. This has led to stable leadership and a workforce keen to refine and improve their practice.
- The school has good opportunities to collaborate with other schools in the trust. Pupils and teachers benefit from this engagement because good practice is shared.
- Effective leadership of teaching in the sixth form ensures that students achieve well. Students also benefit from sound support, advice and guidance.
- Although improving, pupils' attendance is below national levels.
- There are some inconsistencies in teaching so not all pupils are supported or challenged enough to do their best, particularly the most able pupils.
- Some plans have a large number of broad aims and lack sharply identified priorities for improvement.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Reduce the remaining inconsistency in the quality of teaching.
- Further improve the attendance of pupils who are regularly absent from school.
- Further raise achievement across the school, particularly that of the most able pupils.
- Strengthen leadership further by making stronger links between robust self-evaluation and improvement planning to sharpen priorities for improvement.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The principal and leadership team are determined to improve the life chances of all pupils. The principal has successfully created a culture of ambition across the school. Since the last inspection, the focus has shifted from behaviour management to learning and achievement. Strong relationships support an ethos of mutual respect between members of the school community.
- Since joining TSAT, the school has improved rapidly. The rate of pupils' progress has increased markedly, leading to higher outcomes, particularly at GCSE. Disadvantaged pupils are making particularly strong progress, due to improvements in the quality of teaching across the school and the well-targeted use of pupil premium funding.
- TSAT gives effective support and challenge to the school's leaders. The principal was given close guidance by the chief executive officer during the year after the previous inspection. The trust has successfully recruited, developed and retained high-quality leaders, teachers and other staff. Strong links with other secondary schools in the trust have enabled leaders and teachers to improve their skills.
- Throughout the school, staff are hard-working and committed to ensuring that pupils thrive, feel safe and achieve well. Pupils and staff are proud of improvements at the school. The learning environment is very well kept and provides a secure and stimulating place for pupils to learn and develop.
- Staff feel well supported and appreciate the range of training and professional development opportunities. Newly qualified teachers and those new to the school are particularly well supported. Performance management systems make expectations clear and leaders act decisively if these are not met.
- Leaders have strengthened accountability throughout the school by developing systems to check regularly how well pupils are performing. Subject leaders and pastoral leaders come together to review pupils' progress and identify those who are falling behind. Teams work together well, providing support and intervention to help pupils catch up. Some pupils in key stage 4 still carry the legacy of previously poor teaching and require considerable help to address misconceptions and gaps in their knowledge. Senior leaders check that middle leaders are meeting the needs of these pupils successfully.
- Additional funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is spent effectively to improve the progress of pupils. Leaders make sure that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are given focused and appropriate support to address their specific learning needs. This has the greatest impact on younger pupils, as some older pupils' needs were not previously met and this limits their rate of progress.
- The school's curriculum is still developing. The range of subjects provided for pupils in key stage 4 is changing, as better-prepared pupil cohorts move up the school. For example, leaders have successfully tackled limited provision in science so that pupils are now offered three GCSE science qualifications, up from only one GCSE three years ago. Nevertheless, there is more to do, as a minority of pupils study a modern foreign language during key stage 3 and only a few continue to do so at GCSE.

- The school's strengths in art, performing arts and design technology inspire and motivate pupils. Pupils from local grammar schools in the trust attend The Victory Academy to study design technology in the sixth form. Mathematics is increasingly successful and the effective subject leader is providing expertise for the grammar schools in the trust.
- A few of the most able pupils in Years 8 and 9 attend Holcombe Grammar School full time. Within The Victory Academy, a 'Be Great' group identifies pupils who entered the school with the highest prior attainment as well as those who show promise but did not attain highly at key stage 2. This includes the most able disadvantaged pupils who have not achieved their potential. This commendable practice is raising teachers' and pupils' expectations of what pupils might achieve. However, the school's own performance information shows that the most able pupils make slower progress towards their targets than other groups of pupils in most years. Leaders have not followed up this discrepancy.
- The curriculum is enriched by a range of extra-curricular provision, well used by pupils, especially in sport and the performing arts. Pupils in Year 11 told inspectors how much they valued the 'period 6' lessons which run after school and provide support for their BTEC and GCSE studies. The 'art enrichment' sessions are particularly well regarded. The school's STEM group (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) is growing and supported helpfully by some local industries.
- Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain through the successful promotion of British values within the curriculum and a strong ethos of equality. Pupils spoke movingly about the time they have spent reflecting on a number of shocking national events this year.
- Leaders use the Year 7 catch-up funding well to support pupils who enter the school with below-average attainment in English and/or mathematics. Leaders have set up a 'key skills' class, which is helping pupils to catch up with their peers. However, the school has not drawn on primary expertise within the trust to evaluate this provision, to ensure that pupils are developing the skills they need from their individual starting points.
- Although systems and policies are much improved, there has not been enough time to embed consistently strong practice in all areas. Some variation in the quality of teaching persists across and within subjects. Whole-school self-evaluation, although broadly accurate, lacks a sharp focus, and this has led to a large number of priorities in the school's development plan. Plans lack explicit focus and milestones for the performance of some groups, which governors could use to hold school leaders to account even more robustly.
- A low proportion of parents responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Of those who did respond, seven out of 10 would recommend the school to other parents. A parent-teacher association was launched in January and the school has hosted a number of community events, such as a family fun day and tea dance. The number of pupils applying for admission to Year 7 is increasing. Although the confidence of the local community is growing, leaders acknowledge that they need to do more to engage parents and are determined to do so.

Governance of the school

- The trust board, regional governing body and academy advisory board have high aspirations and expectations of the school. Governors bring a wide range of experience to these different levels of governance within the trust. They are rightly proud of the school's success in enabling pupils at the school to achieve well, from very low starting points.
- Governors and trustees have the necessary expertise to both support and challenge leaders. They expect officers of the trust to evaluate the school, and governors verify this through external evaluation. Different layers of governance know the school better than others, with the chair of the academy advisory board able to speak most knowledgeably about pupils' performance.
- The regional governing board, which is the accountable body, recently commissioned a review of pupil premium spending to inform governors about the positive impact of this funding. The chair visited the school to learn for himself how leaders are improving the quality of teaching. Although governors have successfully challenged leaders to improve the performance of disadvantaged pupils, governors are less aware of the slower progress of the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, throughout the school.
- Governors also diligently oversee the excellent arrangements for safeguarding.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders' emphasis on pupils' well-being has ensured a culture of safeguarding, which pervades the school community. Safeguarding systems and practices are very well organised. Statutory procedures for checking the suitability of staff to work with children are efficiently managed. Leaders ensure that regular training and updates about safeguarding are effective. Staff have good communication with parents and other agencies, should they be worried about a pupil. Pupils state that they feel safe and well cared for at school and there are adults they would talk to if they have any problems.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers are enthusiastic and very hard working. They show strong subject knowledge and teach in a lively manner to engage pupils. Teachers make good use of the positive relationships that exist with pupils. They create an atmosphere in lessons that supports pupils to make good progress and show strong personal development. Pupils listen to teachers and each other respectfully and many pupils are confident to share their ideas.
- Overall, lessons are well managed and purposeful. A range of activities help pupils to maintain concentration. Where teaching leads to good or better achievement, skilful questioning checks pupils' understanding, tackles misconceptions and encourages pupils to think deeply. In most lessons, pupils are attentive because the work is

stimulating and well structured. Pupils are willing to have a go at answering questions during class discussion. As one explained, 'We learn from each other's mistakes.'

- Teaching in some subjects, including mathematics, art and design technology, is often highly effective because teachers provide tasks which build on pupils' starting points. During lessons, teachers assess pupils' understanding and adjust the learning activity to offer additional challenge or support necessary to promote secure progress.
- Most teachers identify and effectively use opportunities to develop pupils' verbal and written skills across the curriculum. For example, pupils in science sound out unusual scientific words and are expected to use scientific words accurately to explain their observations. Across the curriculum, teaching helps to expand pupils' vocabulary and develop their confidence in using technical language when they answer questions.
- Teaching assistants are deployed in classrooms effectively to target additional support for specific pupils. Teaching assistants offer skilful questioning to help pupils who require additional support to work things out for themselves. This is promoting better progress for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, especially in the lower year groups.
- Teachers know their pupils well. They regularly check their pupils' progress through frequent assessments. Pupils' work often shows effective feedback from teachers, in line with the school's expectations. Pupils relish the precise and frequent advice they are given in art. In these instances, pupils clearly understand what they have to do to improve and act upon this feedback. However, in some cases, pupils are not using the feedback given to improve their work. There are a few instances where teachers' feedback is not meeting leaders' expectations.
- Occasionally, where teaching is less effective, teachers do not consistently check how well pupils are learning before moving on to the next activity. Sometimes, the most able pupils have to wait for others to catch up before going on to more challenging tasks and so do not make the progress of which they are capable. At other times, pupils are presented with challenging tasks or questions which they are not yet equipped to tackle, or moved on too quickly, before they have a secure knowledge and understanding of the basics.
- Year 7 pupils in key skills lessons are not given activities which closely match their learning needs. Although the school's information shows these pupils catching up with their peers, gaps remain in their individual skills.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Leaders and staff throughout the school have created a caring environment with high expectations. There is an ethos of mutual respect, fostering a high degree of trust and honesty in the school.
- Sensible reorganisation by leaders brought together a range of provision into the 'Student Services' area. This provides a calm and reassuring environment. Staff with high levels of expertise collaborate to support the high proportion of pupils who have

additional difficulties to overcome. These may be emotional, social, behavioural or learning difficulties or sometimes a combination. Pupils were highly appreciative of the support provided.

- Pupils are supported well by their pastoral staff. They are confident that any concerns they may have would be dealt with sensitively and effectively. There are few incidents of bullying, such as the use of derogatory language, and those that do occur are dealt with effectively.
- Staff in the school show relentless determination to help every pupil overcome the difficulties they face. They make sure that vulnerable pupils receive the right emotional and practical guidance and support. The school's support teams work effectively with a range of outside agencies to ensure that pupils receive the care and support they require.
- Pupils take pride in their school uniform and their environment. There is very little litter around the school site, which is well maintained.
- Pupils receive impartial and useful careers information and guidance to support their next stage of development.
- A small number of pupils attend Holcombe Grammar School full time. The school checks their attendance and progress regularly.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. The vast majority of pupils are polite and show consideration for others. Between lessons, pupils listen carefully to the music which plays for a limited period to mark how long they have to get to their next class. Most arrive punctually and are ready to get on with their learning as soon as they arrive.
- The atmosphere around the school is convivial. Pupils socialise sensibly and are keen to tell visitors how much they enjoy school.
- The majority of pupils are keen and attentive in class. The school's focus on literacy, alongside high expectations of mutual respect, encourages pupils to listen well to each other's views and opinions. Pupils work well together. When teaching does not sustain the interests of pupils, the behaviour of a minority deteriorates. Some low-level disruption also occurs when lessons are taught by temporary teachers.
- Attendance of pupils has increased slightly, but remains stubbornly below national levels. Staff are using a range of successful strategies to encourage and enable pupils to attend regularly. Attendance since the start of this term has been higher than during a similar period last year. However, the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent remains above national levels.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils start Year 7 with attainment significantly lower than national levels. Achievement has risen steadily over the last three years. Despite improvements, GCSE results in 2016 showed overall rates of progress below pupils nationally. However, provisional 2017 results show that overall rates of progress of all pupils, and disadvantaged pupils,

are now at least in line with all pupils nationally. This represents a considerable improvement in achievement.

- In 2016, rates of progress in English, mathematics and science were in line with all pupils nationally. Rates of progress in humanities were below national levels. Only a very few pupils took a modern foreign language. Provisional GCSE results for 2017 show improved progress across the curriculum, particularly in mathematics and humanities.
- Overall attainment remains below national levels. In 2016, the proportion who attained at least a grade C was in line with national levels in mathematics, but below national levels in English. Provisional 2017 results show that overall attainment at GCSE remains below national levels and is similar to 2016. However, the 2017 Year 11 cohort entered the school in Year 7 with lower starting points and have made better progress.
- Provisional 2017 GCSE results indicate that the progress made by disadvantaged pupils in the school is faster than other pupils nationally from the same starting points. Evidence from the school's performance information and work in pupils' books shows that, throughout the school, disadvantaged pupils are making strong progress, and in many cases, accelerated progress.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities generally make expected progress. Pupils in key stage 3 are making stronger progress, due to high-quality provision since they joined the school in Year 7.
- The development of pupils' literacy skills is a clear priority and every opportunity is taken to promote reading and improve pupils' verbal and writing skills. This strategy is having a positive impact on the quality of pupils' spoken and written explanations. However, there is more to be done to improve spelling and grammar further.
- The most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, progress steadily towards their targets, but their rate of progress is slower than other groups in the school. Work in books shows that some of the most able pupils could be further stretched and challenged to achieve higher targets.
- Despite leaders' best efforts, a very few pupils significantly underachieve at the end of key stage 4. These pupils have usually followed a partial curriculum. Some of these pupils have a history of underachievement due to poor behaviour, low attendance or face other considerable challenges. Over time, as provision for all pupils continues to improve, the number of these low-performing 'hard to reach' pupils should diminish.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The sixth form is well led. Leaders and sixth-form staff generate a positive culture based on effective student support and high expectations. During the time in the sixth form, students are provided with a range of experiences and opportunities that enable them to develop well. Students value the care and quality of teaching they receive. A very high proportion stay on from Year 12 to Year 13.
- Students' behaviour in the sixth form is good. Students have positive relationships with their teachers and peers. They engage well with their learning and attendance has

improved to national levels. Students are good role models for younger pupils and enjoy supporting them in a variety of ways, such as hearing them read.

- At the end of 2016, the school met both the academic and vocational minimum standards and students made strong progress in academic subjects. Provisional information about 2017 outcomes shows that students made strong progress in both academic and vocational subjects.
- Students enter the sixth form with GCSE grades much lower than typical nationally. The students with the lowest prior attainment, including grade D or below at GCSE, make the greatest progress. Many of these students had underachieved at GCSE, due to the poor progress they made by the end of their Year 11. In the sixth form, higher expectations and better teaching than they previously experienced, enable these students to achieve much more highly by the end of their sixth-form studies.
- The proportion of students who improve their grades when they retake GCSE English in the sixth form is higher than national levels. The proportion who improve their GCSE grade in mathematics is in line with national levels.
- Teaching in the sixth form is consistently good. During the inspection, teachers' secure subject knowledge and skilful questioning were effectively extending students' learning.
- Leaders carefully track students' progress, identify those who are in danger of falling behind and ensure that effective support is provided. However, current targets for vocational subjects are confusing and leaders are reviewing them.
- The curriculum has been appropriately designed to build on students' starting points. The curriculum offer includes some subjects taught at Holcombe Grammar School and an increasing number of students study a combination of A-level subjects at both schools. This broadens the choice for pupils at The Victory Academy. The post-16 curriculum is developing as cohorts progress into the sixth form with higher GCSE grades. For example, this year, for the first time, over 20 students in Year 12 are studying A levels in science.
- Some students from grammar schools in the trust attend The Victory Academy to follow the successful A-level course in product design.
- Regular, impartial careers advice enables students to be well prepared for the future. Participation in work experience is well planned. An increasing number of pupils are achieving their first choices in higher education, training or employment.

School details

Unique reference number	136108
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	10032903

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

Type of school	Secondary (non-selective)
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	714
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	102
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Peter Martin
Principal	Mandy Gage
Telephone number	01634 303005
Website	www.thevictoryacademy.org.uk
Email address	office@thevictoryacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	17–18 June 2015

Information about this school

- 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.
- The academy is sponsored by the Thinking Schools Academy Trust (TSAT).
- The Victory Academy is smaller than the average-sized mixed secondary school. It is located in an area where there are a number of grammar schools which recruit the

most able students. Consequently, a high number of pupils enter the school with low prior attainment.

- The school shares expertise and accesses support and training from other schools within the trust. A small number of pupils and sixth-form students study at The Rochester Grammar School and Holcombe Grammar School.
- The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils from multi-ethnic groups and who speak English as an additional language is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average.
- There are much higher numbers of disadvantaged pupils compared to the national average.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning in 36 lessons across a range of year groups from Year 7 to Year 13. Eleven of these were jointly observed with senior leaders. Inspectors visited a number of other classes.
- Inspectors looked at a range of pupils' work in lessons and a further selection of pupils' books was scrutinised. Pupils' behaviour was observed in lessons, around the school and during breaktimes.
- Inspectors held meetings with the chief executive officer, principal and director of secondary education for the trust as well as senior leaders, groups of middle leaders, teachers, governors and directors of TSAT.
- Inspectors took into account 44 responses to the confidential questionnaires received from staff and also met with individuals and groups of staff.
- The views of pupils were taken into account and inspectors met with groups of pupils including sixth-form students.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents taking into account 21 responses to the online Ofsted parent questionnaire, Parent View, including 18 free-text responses.
- Inspectors evaluated key documents including: the school's strategic planning documents; minutes of meetings, including governor and board meetings; reports of attendance and behaviour; and records relating to pupils' safety and academic progress.

Inspection team

Theresa Phillips, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Ann Fearon	Ofsted Inspector
Andrew Foster	Ofsted Inspector
Susan Derrick	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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