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Mr David Thompson
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Dear Mr Thompson

Short inspection of Hebburn Comprehensive School

Following my visit to the school on 21 June 2017 with Geoff Brookes, Ofsted Inspector, 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 January 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school is improving because of the very clear leadership that you and your senior leadership team provide. You, alongside governors and senior leaders, have an accurate understanding of the strengths and priorities for improvement. You and your governors promote a strong conviction that all pupils should achieve well regardless of their circumstances or backgrounds, and this ensures that all pupils have every opportunity to 'learn, achieve, aspire, succeed'. Such values are instilled in senior and middle leaders and have permeated all staff. Consequently, the vast majority of staff say they are proud to be a part of the school.

In such an inclusive environment, staff typically promote high expectations. Good relationships between adults and pupils make a strong contribution to pupils' learning and well-being. The vast majority of pupils say that they are listened to and feel well supported. When pupils are given opportunities to work together in lessons, they show high levels of engagement, cooperation and respect for each other's ideas.

Pupils are confident and they engage well with visitors. Pupils speak with fondness and enthusiasm about their teachers, and say how approachable and supportive all staff are.

Pupils benefit from opportunities to take part in extra-curricular activities, such as

sport, drama and music, which play a significant role in developing their confidence. Pupils' entrepreneurial and charitable skills are also developed through the 'key fund' project. This project encourages pupils to work together on a fund-raising idea and then plan, prepare and present it to an independent panel. If successful, groups of pupils organise different events to raise money and subsequently give something back to the local community; for example, care packs for homeless people and donations to the food banks. As a result, pupils' determination and resilience skills are developed, along with their moral values.

A dedicated team of learning mentors have provided effective support to groups of identified pupils, both academically and pastorally. Such support ensures that most pupils successfully move on to the next stage of their education, training or employment.

Leaders and governors have ensured that the school has continued to focus on the areas identified for improvement at the previous inspection. As a result, senior and middle leaders have refined the curriculum and skilfully integrated assessment modules to monitor pupils' progress closely. Consequently, close monitoring of pupils' progress allows leaders to identify any pupil lagging behind. Leaders use this information to place pupils on an appropriate and personalised support and intervention package. This is allowing the vast majority of current pupils to make stronger gains in their learning. However, some disadvantaged pupils and some pupils in science (both in the past and currently) have not made the same rapid rates of progress as their peers. Leaders and governors acknowledge that this is an urgent priority and are taking effective steps to rectify these differences.

Following the last inspection, you were also asked to further improve the quality of teaching by sharing teachers' skills more widely across the school. The sharing of best practice and developing teachers' skills is now commonplace and it is an integral part of teachers' professional development. There is some high-quality teaching in the school. You have increased the rigour with which you check the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Consequently, weaknesses are addressed quickly through departmental and whole-school training sessions.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have taken an active and rigorous approach towards the safety and welfare of pupils. A culture of safeguarding is evident in all aspects of the school's work. Leaders carry out the required safeguarding checks on all adults who work with pupils, and staff receive relevant and regular training on safeguarding.

Leaders have effective systems in place to monitor all pupils for whom they have concerns. Record-keeping is meticulous and the designated safeguarding leader treats safeguarding concerns with a high degree of professionalism. She rigorously follows these through with referrals to other agencies so that all vulnerable pupils are cared for appropriately.

The pastoral staff work collectively to support pupils and to make sure that they are safe. Through the planned curriculum, pupils are given a variety of opportunities to learn about how to keep themselves and others safe, including when using the internet or social media. Pupils informed inspectors that they know who to approach if they have any worries, and that they were confident that any issue would be dealt with quickly and in an appropriate way.

Inspection findings

- Inspectors explored why in 2016 the progress made by disadvantaged pupils, particularly in English and science and for low prior attaining disadvantaged pupils, was below that of other pupils in the school and nationally. It is evident that tailored support was given to the most vulnerable low prior attaining disadvantaged pupils. This tailored support enabled these pupils to leave the school with the basic knowledge and skills they needed to be able to succeed in their future lives.
- You, along with other leaders, have taken steps to continuously improve the outcomes of all disadvantaged pupils; for example, the use of before- and after-school 'catch up' sessions and the 'levelled' intervention packages you offer to individual pupils to accelerate their progress.
- All staff are aware that disadvantaged pupils' progress is a high priority and current school assessment information indicates that disadvantaged pupils, particularly low prior attaining disadvantaged pupils, are, across a wider range of subjects, making better progress. Leaders recognise that, in some year groups, the current progress of some disadvantaged pupils is not consistently high enough, but are taking effective steps to support them.
- Outcomes in mathematics have been consistently strong because of effective teaching. In 2016, outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in English and science were not as strong as they were in mathematics. I made this an inspection focus. In English, teachers consistently make good use of the school's assessment information to challenge pupils to extend their knowledge and understanding. Pupils' books in English demonstrate that disadvantaged pupils are making progress in line with their peers and in some cases better than their peers. Teaching in English is as strong as that seen in mathematics.
- In science, teachers do not consistently use information about pupils' prior learning. Consequently, the level of challenge that pupils receive is variable across biology, chemistry and physics. Pupils' books in the three science subjects are also variable, in relation to both content and challenge. Leaders are aware that the focus on improving outcomes for all pupils in science needs to be maintained.
- Inspectors looked closely at how well leaders have improved attendance and reduced exclusions for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You place a strong focus on the benefits of good attendance and you have gone as far as to buy alarm clocks for some pupils. It is very clear that communication with parents and pupils is a high priority in the school's work to improve attendance for individual pupils. Tracking

is regular and carefully monitored. This leads to appropriate interventions, for example: daily phone calls, picking children up from home, and work with external agencies. These actions are leading to improvements for individual pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. So far in this school year, attendance overall and for groups of pupils has shown some signs of improvement and it is steadily moving towards the national average. The school has seen an increase in the proportion of pupils with 100% attendance. Nevertheless, leaders acknowledge that the absence rates for disadvantaged pupils are not improving fast enough.

- The number of fixed-term exclusions for current pupils has reduced significantly, overall and for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Provision in the 'Amber Zone' is a deterrent for poor behaviour in lessons. It provides a supervised area for pupils to complete their work if necessary; consequently, there are very few lessons disrupted because of poor behaviour as pupils do not want to be sent there. The majority of staff, parents and pupils say that behaviour is good.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- your focus on improving the quality of teaching through a consistency of high expectations and challenge in lessons is maintained throughout the school, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and in science
- the work to improve pupils' attendance continues to improve and be sustained, so that attendance for all groups is at least in line with the national average.

I am copying this letter to the chair of governors, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for South Tyneside. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Darren Stewart
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Meetings took place with you and members of your senior and middle leadership teams. Meetings also took place with a group of governors, and groups of pupils from Years 7, 8, 9 and 10.

Inspectors examined the school's self-evaluation document, and records concerning attendance, exclusions and destinations. They scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures,

records of checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children, and the school's own assessment of the progress it is making.

Inspectors, with members of the senior leadership team, observed learning in a range of year groups. Inspectors reviewed work in pupils' books and spoke with pupils about their learning during lessons. Inspectors took account of the 28 responses to Ofsted's online parental questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors also considered the 49 staff questionnaire responses and the 142 pupil questionnaire responses.