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Mr Peter Eyre
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mr Eyre

Short inspection of Huntcliff School

Following my visit with Nicholas Whittaker, Her Majesty's Inspector, to the school on 8 December 2015, 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 February 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The new leadership team has sustained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

The executive headteacher, in post since only September 2015, has raised expectations and brought a fresh impetus to the school's work, following a period of leadership change and turbulence. All leaders are clear about the school's core priorities and provide members of staff with effective support and challenge. There is a clear sense of direction and a tangible sense of high expectation. Under the senior leadership team's guidance, the climate around the school is positive and productive. Pupils conduct themselves well, they work hard and are prepared to persevere when faced with challenging new topics.

Lines of accountability at all levels have been strengthened. The governors know the school well, in part because they challenge the executive headteacher regularly to demonstrate the impact of his leadership. In turn, senior leaders meet frequently with heads of department and hold them accountable for the progress of all pupils. Systems to track pupils' progress are highly effective and assessment information is used well so that any pupils making slower progress are quickly identified and supported to get back on track. Consequently, gaps in the attainment of different

groups of pupils, such as those from disadvantaged backgrounds and disabled pupils or those with special educational needs, are narrowing over time.

In most subject areas, pupils make at least the progress that is expected. The school continues to have particular strengths in the teaching of humanities and languages, subjects in which pupils make significantly better progress than that seen nationally. Because of this, the proportion of pupils that attain the English baccalaureate is well above the national average. Leaders have a detailed knowledge of where teaching is occasionally less effective and are taking appropriate steps to address such inconsistencies.

The new leadership team has also sharpened expectations regarding behaviour and attendance. Lateness and absence are challenged robustly. Expectations for behaviour and conduct around the school are clear and well understood. As a result, overall levels of attendance are improving and there are fewer pupils than previously that are regularly absent. Nevertheless, leaders and governors have identified that improving attendance further is a key priority for the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All policies and records relating to the safeguarding of pupils are up to date and of high quality. Members of staff, including the designated safeguarding leader, receive regular training and know their responsibilities well. They ensure there is a culture of vigilance and care. Partnership working with the partner primary school, the local authority and other external agencies is well developed.

Pupils' understanding of how to keep healthy and safe is effectively promoted through the school's life-skills programme. For example, pupils are well informed about online safety and know how to keep themselves safe when using computers and the internet. The school also promotes equality and tackles discrimination positively. Any use of discriminatory or derogatory language is tackled head-on. Pupils of all ages confidently stated that the school is a safe and caring environment in which to learn.

Inspection findings

- The executive headteacher and new leadership team have brought renewed energy and drive for improvement. There is a clarity of purpose and sense of direction shared by members of staff.
- In this relatively small secondary school, leaders know the pupils individually and work hard to raise their aspirations. The vast majority of pupils in Key Stage 4 know what they must achieve in order to take their next steps. Last year, all Year 11 pupils successfully found places in further education, employment or training.

- Effective management systems are in place to track pupils' academic progress and to intervene where progress is less than expected. Leaders place a strong emphasis on narrowing gaps in attainment between different groups of pupils. The most recent assessment information shows efforts to improve the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils are proving successful, right across the curriculum.
- This is an inclusive school that has good provision in place for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, and they make good progress in English, mathematics and most other subjects. The school community provides a good level of care and individual needs are well met.
- Most teaching in the school is of high quality. Occasionally, untidy and incomplete work goes unchallenged or marking is not used as well as it could be to deepen pupils' understanding. In one or two subjects, turbulence in staffing contributed to slower than expected progress last year. Gaps in staffing are now mostly filled.
- Overall, levels of attendance for 2014/15 were below the national average. The proportion of pupils regularly absent was also higher than seen nationally. Renewed and more concerted efforts by leaders are having a positive impact, however, and attendance so far for this academic year has risen above the national average. Pupils told inspectors that the school has made it clear that attending regularly and being punctual are high priorities. Nevertheless, the recent improvements in attendance have yet to be sustained and the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, in particular, requires further improvement.
- Most pupils show positive attitudes to learning and participate readily in lessons. The number of incidents of disruptive behaviour has fallen markedly reflecting the widespread acceptance of the school's code of conduct.
- The school is committed to working in partnership with other schools and academies in the local authority. Effective collaboration between primary, secondary, further education and special school leaders is helping to sustain and further strengthen the quality of leadership. Middle leaders are benefiting from working with their counterparts in other secondary schools and learning from the best practice available. For example, a recent peer review of the mathematics department has helped to refine the quality of provision.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that they:

- focus relentlessly on improving levels of attendance, particularly for those pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds who are absent from school more frequently
- sustain good-quality teaching by:
 - ensuring all teachers set high expectations for the presentation of work and challenge those pupils who fail to show sufficient pride or care
 - ensuring pupils improve their work in response to the teacher's marking and feedback.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Redcar and Cleveland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, we held meetings with you and other senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and other governors, a group of pupils and a representative of the local authority. Together, we observed a number of lessons across Key Stages 3 and 4. During these observations we sampled pupils' books and talked to pupils to gauge their level of engagement and understanding. We also observed pupils' behaviour and the climate around the campus at social times. We scrutinised a range of documentation including your self-evaluation and plans for improvement, minutes of governing body meetings and checks made on the quality of teaching. We also took account of attendance data and assessment information on the progress of pupils currently in the school. In addition, we considered the 36 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View), the responses to a staff and pupil questionnaire and information relating to the safeguarding of pupils.