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Mrs L Mavin  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Mavin

### **Short inspection of Columbia Grange School**

Following my visit to the school on 23 February 2016 with Margaret Farrow HMI, 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 outstanding in March 2011.

#### **This school continues to be outstanding.**

The new leadership team has maintained the high quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Staff changes since the last inspection, including your own appointment as headteacher, have further strengthened provision and leadership. The core of the school's success is the strong relationships between adults, pupils and parents, and the detailed knowledge and understanding of each pupil's specific needs. A good balance is struck between caring for pupils and meeting their welfare needs, and enabling them to learn and achieve the best they can. Consequently, pupils continue to thrive and develop in response to the excellent nurturing environment that the school has created.

The school's mission statement of 'Little steps, and big aspirations for all', encapsulates the ambition that you, staff, governors and parents have for every pupil. It is also well demonstrated in the meticulous way that you and the deputy headteacher are rigorously and accurately identifying where the school's work can be developed and improved even further. You are driving improvements in areas where you need to, such as teaching and assessment. There is a more secure focus on developing pupils' communication and language skills and in ensuring that the school provides a rich environment to promote their learning at every opportunity. This is evident in lessons and in displays of pupils' work, signage around school, and in tasks that are displayed in pictures and symbols on entry to the sports hall and workshop areas.

Expectations of pupils' progress are generally very sharp. Teachers are using the detailed assessments and observations they make when pupils first arrive at the school much more purposefully to set meaningful targets for pupils' academic and personal development. In the visits made to lessons, we saw how teachers are using them consistently to plan learning activities. The more frequent checks that you have introduced to review pupils' progress and reset targets have led to more pupils making rapid progress over the last year. You are keenly aware of the need to embed these developments further, especially in some Key Stage 2 classes where the most-able pupils are not always challenged as well as they could be to extend and deepen their learning. You have high expectations of all staff and pupils and an accurate knowledge of the strengths in teaching. Your knowledge of where developments are needed to enable swifter progress was well demonstrated during our discussions about the teaching and learning that we examined together. In discussions with staff, and in their responses to the inspection survey, it is clear that they know and share your high expectations of them. You have created a climate in which staff are proud to work at the school and are keen to improve their practice even further.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Staff and governors are alert to the potential dangers to pupils and are attentive in ensuring that they are safe and risks are minimised. Safer recruiting procedures are robust and all staff receive regular high-quality training to ensure that their knowledge of safety and safeguarding is up to date. All of the school's safeguarding documents, records and processes are fit for purpose and are implemented effectively in everyday working practices. All governors have been trained recently in child protection and in 'Prevent'. They have a clear understanding of their duties but have yet to apply this sharper insight to ensure that current policies are appropriately tailored to the needs of pupils in the school. Together with the Chair of the Governing Body, you have developed a rolling programme of policy review and inroads are being made in reducing the number of policies that are out of date. Risk assessments are in place for all activities. For individual pupils they include details of known triggers and how to respond to unwanted behaviours.

### **Inspection findings**

- Highly effective induction and transition systems to support and prepare pupils when they join the school, and when they leave, promote their learning exceptionally well.
- Pupils arrive promptly and in uniform. Their day starts smoothly and calmly because of the warm welcome they get. Staff know pupils well and are attuned to their feelings as they walk through the door. Staff are skilled at de-escalating situations. Adults' skills in managing complex behaviour can be seen in the lack of need to physically restrain any child since September 2015.
- The quality of teaching is of a high standard throughout the school and pupils make swift progress over time. Teachers use pupils' assessments to plan a clear sequence to learning. They use questioning effectively and pupils know what is expected of them.

- Additional support from specialist workers funded by the pupil premium is a strength of the provision. It is well targeted to ensure that disadvantaged pupils, who make up approximately half of the school, make swift progress and over time gaps are closing quickly in some classes and have closed in others.
- Children in the early years are making a surge in their progress in response to well-structured sessions and effective teaching and provision that is specific to their needs. Accurate and detailed assessments in learning journals show children are making even progress in all areas.
- Pupils feel they are safe in school and enjoy, and engage well in, a wide range of activities. There is clear evidence of a sense of belonging at Columbia Grange. In discussions, pupils demonstrated a good understanding of risks associated with water, fire and how to keep safe when crossing roads.
- New governors are developing their role in holding the school to account. They are keen to contribute and utilise their skills and enable pupils to experience exciting visits. Governors participate in senior leadership meetings. They challenge and ask difficult questions.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they strengthen teaching further to ensure that teachers in Key Stage 2 classes make better use of assessment information to plan tasks that challenge the most-able pupils
- current policies are appropriately tailored to pupils in the school
- information about behaviour incidents and analysis of physical interventions are regularly reported to governors so that they can evaluate more precisely the impact of their policies on pupils' outcomes.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Sunderland City Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Gina White  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During this one-day inspection, my colleague and I discussed the work of the school with you, your deputy headteacher and a group of teachers, teaching assistants and support staff. We carried out short observations of teaching and learning, most of which were carried out with you and the deputy headteacher. We also met with a group of governors and a group of pupils. In addition, we spoke with pupils at playtime and lunchtime and held a brief telephone discussion with a representative of the local authority. We looked at pupils' work and assessment information. We examined a number of documents including the school's own evaluation of its performance, improvement plans, policies, governors' minutes and the information posted on the school website. I took account of the school's own survey of parents' views as there was only one recent response to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.