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Mr John Page
Acting headteacher
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Dear Mr Page

Short inspection of Fairfield School

Following my visit to the school on 10 November 2016 with Nicholas Whittaker 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 good in March 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since you took up the post of acting headteacher in April 2016 you have very quickly established yourself as a highly effective leader. The support you have received from the national leader of education (NLE) has assisted you to move the school forward at a fast pace. The leadership of the school has been through a period of instability. Upon your arrival, you very quickly identified the existing strengths within the school and began to build on them. You also recognised areas in need of improvement equally quickly and began to address them with speed. This measured approach has already led to important changes being made in the way the school operates and these have been received favourably by pupils, staff and parents.

Members of staff share your vision and unrelenting ambition to move the school even further forward. They are particularly appreciative of the improvements you have made to systems for monitoring their performance. They say they feel valued, appreciated and listened to, and are keen to take on new roles and areas of responsibility.

While some governors are new to post, all expressed the view that you have brought stability to the leadership of the school and have begun to unite the different departments within the school. This view was echoed by members of staff, who commented that the school now has a 'truly whole-school feeling'. The

introduction of mathematics and English coordinators has helped drive up standards across the school.

Parents we spoke to commented that your appointment was like 'a breath of fresh air'. They also said they feel their children are making good progress and are very well cared for when at school. Pupils also agreed that staff make school fun and learning interesting.

The previous inspection report asks the school to increase the percentage of outstanding achievement, particularly for older pupils in mathematics. The work of the new mathematics coordinator has improved the quality of teaching in mathematics and, consequently, a larger proportion of pupils are now making accelerated progress.

A further recommendation was to increase pupils' attendance by ensuring that parents, pupils and staff are aware of the link between pupils' progress and regular attendance. Parents and staff praised the tactful but tenacious approach taken by the family liaison officer. The steady rise in pupils' overall attendance over the last year is evidence of her success.

You acknowledge that in the recent past the school has undergone some staffing difficulties. At the time of this inspection many staff were relatively new to the school. However, the high quality of staff training that you have provided made it difficult for the inspection team to identify those new to post, as the teamwork observed was so effective.

Despite the short length of time in post, leaders have secured good teaching and this has led to improving outcomes for pupils across the school. Assessment is used effectively by many staff to plan the next steps pupils need to take. Leaders are aware that there are further issues they need to address. For example, systems currently in place for checking the progress pupils make need further refinement. This is so that the information can be used to support pupils more accurately and accelerate progress in all areas of the curriculum.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that pupils have a safe and secure environment by promoting a clear culture of safeguarding throughout the school. Members of staff new to the school affirm that the training they receive is thorough and comprehensive. The senior leadership team and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality. Staff and parents agree that safeguarding has a very high priority within the school.

The close working partnership between the deputy headteacher and the family welfare and liaison officer has ensured that record-keeping is well organised and effective. Their good knowledge and understanding of safeguarding requirements, coupled with their regular attention to local information, has enabled them to provide regular updates to all staff.

High-quality risk assessments are in place which outline identified risks and the actions taken to address them. These are shared with all members of staff and are signed off by members of the leadership team.

Staff have followed your lead in promoting communication for all. This focus on ensuring that pupils are supported to communicate by whichever method possible has increased pupils' confidence and helped to develop their independence. This has also contributed to keeping them safe, by ensuring they can say 'No' and are able to alert adults if they are unhappy about the behaviour of others.

The curriculum enables pupils to learn how to keep safe through teaching them life skills, such as how to cross the road safely and teaching children how to play together amicably.

Inspection findings

- Ensuring that pupils make good progress has been a key focus for you since you arrived at the school. You and the senior leadership team have very quickly put in place checks on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school. This, coupled with a focus on checking information on pupils' progress, has enabled you to pinpoint where pupils make the best progress and where more needs to be done.
- Although the system for monitoring progress is new and you are aware more work needs to be done to make it even more accurate, it clearly shows that pupils are making good and better progress overall.
- The new mathematics coordinator has made sure that mathematics is now taught in a consistent way across school. Mathematical themes are shared across school and pupils' learning is more closely linked across year groups.
- Pupils in the early years and key stage 1 work closely together on a range of themes both inside and outside the classroom. Staff focus on ensuring that everyone joins in. For example, children with a very wide range of needs all used a rainbow-coloured parachute to go under and over and bounce balls on. Learning for this group ranged from concentrating, grasping the parachute, running underneath and experiencing the sensation of the material on their faces.
- Post-16 students learn a range of skills dependent upon their ability. For example, most-able students learn how to use money in a range of different settings.
- Parents spoken to during the inspection were very clear about the link between attendance and pupils' achievement. They commented positively on the role the family welfare and liaison officer plays in improving attendance. Comments such as 'She takes a firm but sensitive approach' summed up parents' views. As a result, attendance has improved under the direction of the new leadership team and has risen by more than 5% in the last two terms.
- Staff now recognise that attendance is a concern for everyone and now register pupils twice daily. This has speeded up the school's response to

pupils' absence. Clear systems are now in place to log and follow up all absence as quickly as possible. However, you are accurate in your self-evaluation and recognise that further work is needed to improve pupils' attendance even further.

- Training records show that staff, including those new to post, have completed a wide range of recent and relevant training. Recent training includes safeguarding updates, training on the correct way to move and handle pupils and behaviour management.
- The individual plans in place to support the health needs of pupils are written in conjunction with healthcare professionals including paediatric consultants. Training is provided by the on-site nursing and therapist team. This close working practice is appreciated by staff who feel very well supported and parents who feel reassured that their children are receiving high-quality care. Pupils are very clear that they feel safe and enjoy coming to school. A comment from one sums up the feeling of most, 'School would be even better if it was open on Saturday and Sunday.'
- You and the NLE introduced a system for measuring teachers' performance very quickly. This has helped drive up standards at a fast pace. Teachers say they now feel valued and recognised for the contribution they are making to improve the school.
- The role that middle leaders play in improving outcomes for pupils has increased under your guidance. The curriculum in particular has seen much change as departments within the school have started to work more closely together. This has led to more exciting opportunities for pupils and has increased the progress of pupils from their different starting points.
- However, the role that middle leaders play is not yet fully developed. For example, all do not evaluate the quality of teaching in their phase or subject area. While this is a target in the school development plan, further work is needed to increase the role they play.
- A new chair of the governing body took up post very recently. Already, he has a clear understanding of the school's current position. Discussions with governors demonstrate their commitment to the school and their increasing knowledge of how to challenge and support you and your senior leaders in all areas.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they further develop systems currently in place to check pupils' progress, so that they include all subject areas in the curriculum
- they accelerate pupils' progress by increasing the role played by middle leaders in checking the quality of teaching and progress made by pupils in their phase or subject area.

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

Yours sincerely

Marian Thomas
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspection team focused on the following five key lines of enquiry during the inspection:

- Have outcomes for pupils continued to improve, particularly in mathematics? Do pupils make consistent progress across the school? Are targets set for pupils sufficiently challenging?
- Have leaders taken effective action to improve attendance? Are parents, staff and pupils clear about the link between pupils' attendance and achievement?
- Are all staff knowledgeable about the complex needs of pupils in their care? Have new staff received sufficiently effective training to enable them to support pupils' needs and manage their behaviour?
- How effective have the current leadership team been in stabilising the leadership and management of the school? Is the school moving forward and is an effective performance management system contributing to improved outcomes? Are governors playing an effective role in holding leaders to account?
- Do school leaders give safeguarding a high enough priority within the school? Are safeguarding incidents recorded effectively? Do risk assessments take into consideration pupils' complex needs?

In order to explore these areas the inspection team made short visits to lessons accompanied by members of the leadership team. They also listened to a small number of most-able pupils read. Meetings were held with pupils, staff, senior leaders, members of the safeguarding team, middle leaders, three governors, a small group of parents and a representative from the local authority. A range of documents were scrutinised including safeguarding and attendance documents, information about pupils' progress and the curriculum.