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Mrs Alison Sinclair
Principal
Gurney Pease Academy
Dodsworth Street
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Dear Mrs Sinclair

Short inspection of Gurney Pease Academy

Following my visit to the school on 22 November 2016, 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 July 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You joined the school as principal in September 2014 following the retirement of the previous headteacher. You have ensured that the school remains good and you continue to tackle weaknesses effectively. You have established a clear senior and middle leadership team whose members are accountable for their areas of responsibility and are highly involved in school improvement. Your liaison with other schools in the trust has made the monitoring of teaching and learning more effective. You have also enlisted support from outstanding schools so that you can focus on improvements in particular areas such as the teaching of phonics. Following the last inspection, you were asked to improve the quality of teaching with particular regard to inconsistencies in behaviour management, matching learning tasks to pupils' needs and ensuring that feedback helps pupils improve their work. This you have done well. You and your staff have retained the very caring and nurturing culture evidenced at the last inspection and you all take the time to get to know your pupils extremely well.

Adults in the school manage behaviour well and pupils respond well to instruction. However, pupils have too few opportunities to take ownership and responsibility for their own personal development, behaviour and well-being. Some governors need to develop further their role and the skills they have so that they can support school improvement more effectively.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have taken on the role of designated safeguarding lead yourself and have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The safeguarding policy is comprehensive, gives clear guidance to both staff and parents and is easily accessible on the school website. You make detailed records and use a commercial scheme to monitor all incidents well. You make appropriate links with other pupils and family members when necessary. All records are stored appropriately. You make contact with outside agencies when required and have secured the time of a trained counsellor who is on site on a weekly basis to support pupils and parents. Pupils feel safe and staff supervise them well at breaktimes. They know how to keep themselves safe on the internet. They know that the fencing around the school and the checking of all visitors to the site help keep them safe. However, they are not encouraged to take ownership of keeping themselves safe and their bodies healthy. Pupils do not currently take roles of responsibility such as looking after each other at playtime or taking part in risk assessments. Too many pupils do not have a good enough understanding that some rules are in place to keep them safe and healthy, for example why they are not allowed sweets in their packed lunches.

Inspection findings

- You lead your school very well. You and your senior leaders have an accurate picture of the quality of teaching and learning. You have strengthened your middle leadership team with appointments of skilled staff who now lead on areas such as English and special educational needs and/or disabilities. Regular monitoring of teaching and learning is linked to pupils' progress so that teachers can be held to account for learning in their class. Stronger teaching is rewarded appropriately and support given to those who need it. Assessment information is used well to analyse strengths and weaknesses in learning. This information is used alongside other forms of monitoring so that steps can be taken to ensure that pupils' needs are met. The work you have completed with other schools within the trust has helped maintain and support improvement, such as in moderation processes and the quality of lesson observations. Where you have personally sought support from schools outside the trust, this has been particularly helpful, for example in the teaching of phonics and of disadvantaged pupils. Parents' opinions of all aspects of school life are positive. The school is currently introducing new ways to encourage better communication between school and parents so that parents can be more involved in their child's learning.
- Governors receive detailed information from you on a regular basis about all aspects of school life. This enables them to gain a sound knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They use this information to challenge the school and offer support through liaison with other schools in the trust. They do not always challenge the validity of this information thoroughly enough. The chair of the governing body uses her skills well to support school improvement. Other governors take a less prominent role and some need to identify the skills they have and use these to support school improvement more effectively.

- Pupils are well behaved and their behaviour is consistently managed by staff. They move around school with little adult supervision and quickly settle into learning after breaks and at the start of the school day. They are polite and courteous and talk with pride about their school. They have positive attitudes and this supports learning well. Currently, pupils have too few opportunities to demonstrate how responsible they can be for their own behaviour and that of others. Pupils say that they enjoy coming to school and attendance is an improving picture. You have ensured that the need for good attendance is promoted in all newsletters. The time that the police community support officer (PCSO) spends in school has been increased this year to try and improve attendance rates further.
- Through the systematic monitoring of teaching and learning, you and your team have ensured that the quality of teaching remains good. The different learning needs of pupils are now well met. In key stages 1 and 2, a whole-school strategy to meet different ability needs works well. The use of success criteria and tracking sheets, which are also linked to pupils' self-assessment of their learning, helps the least- and most-able pupils know exactly what to aim for. Teachers, particularly in key stage 2, have excellent subject knowledge which is used well to enhance learning. Most-able pupils are challenged well through questioning and by the setting of aspirational targets. Teachers help pupils know how they can improve their work through marking their books and through verbal feedback in lessons. Pupils' work in books shows how productive they are in lessons and how high expectations are, particularly for the most able pupils. Disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well as the teachers identify their needs accurately and they receive appropriate support.
- Younger children learn in stimulating and well-planned environments that are appropriate to their needs both inside and outside. Interactions with adults are positive and help them learn both socially and academically. Learning journals clearly show the progress these children are making and how assessments are used to plan what they should learn next. The separate inside and outside provision for two-year-olds offers a secure environment which supports the development of these children well.
- Teaching pupils to read well and enjoy reading continues to take a high priority in the school. Phonics is well taught and pupils are grouped according to ability to support learning. A new library and book corners in classrooms demonstrate how important reading is to school leaders and how all adults have a driving ambition to foster a love of reading. Most-able readers read fluently from a range of difficult texts and are able to show good comprehension skills such as in guided reading sessions. Least-able readers read confidently using their phonic skills to help them. A speech and language therapist visits the school on a regular basis to help pupils develop language skills. Examples of pupils' writing work show that they learn skills through a range of genres and are highly productive in lessons. The progress they have made from low starting points is evident.

- Pupils' work in books also demonstrates how teachers have a high expectation of literacy across all subjects. Disadvantaged pupils make strong progress in almost all year groups in writing. Pupils' progress in mathematics continues to be a strength of the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all governors develop and use their skills to support and challenge the school more effectively
- pupils are allowed more ownership and responsibility for their own personal development, behaviour and well-being.

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

Yours sincerely

Jo Sharpe
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, the following particular areas were focused on:

- Is safeguarding still effective?
- Has the quality of teaching remained good?
- Reading was a strength at the last inspection. Is it still?
- Has pupils' progress in writing deteriorated?
- Are leadership and management of the school still good?
- Are rates of attendance continuing to improve?

During the inspection, I met with you, in your role as principal and designated safeguarding lead, and the chair of the executive standards committee. I also met with pupils throughout the day both informally and formally and listened to pupils of different abilities read. School surveys that had been completed by pupils and parents were also considered. Parents' views following discussions with them were also gathered. We visited classes together and looked at a number of books to consider the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Behaviour was observed throughout the day, including at dinnertime and morning breaktime. A range of documentation was scrutinised, including that relating to safeguarding, pupils' progress and the quality of teaching in school.