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Mrs Judith Donovan  
Headteacher  
Gibside School  
Burnthouse Lane  
Whickham  
Tyne and Wear  
NE16 5AT

Dear Mrs Donovan

### **Short inspection of Gibside School**

Following my visit to the school on 7 March 2017 with Ofsted Inspector Judith James, 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 October 2012.

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

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Following your appointment in April 2015, you picked up the baton from the previous headteacher, building sensibly on the recognised strengths and driving improvement further. You have had a lot to do. You have developed, and are now embedding, rigorous systems to assess pupils' learning. You have successfully developed a larger staff team, including more senior and middle leaders, to meet the needs of the school. This is because the number of pupils attending has almost doubled since the previous inspection. You have recently extended early years provision onto another site. Aply supported by senior and middle leaders, along with your governors, you have implemented change and improvement skilfully. Importantly, you have never lost sight of the successful vision you all share – to ensure that pupils blossom and thrive, personally, socially, emotionally and educationally, during their time at Gibside.

When I came to the school, I wanted to check if the tracking and recording of pupils' progress in to order drive further improvement in pupils' learning and development had improved. This was the only area that required attention at the previous inspection. You and the leader for assessment have transformed procedures, developing highly specialised systems that are matched precisely to the complex special educational needs and/or disabilities of each pupil. Teachers use their assessments carefully to plan activities that build pupils' skills and confidence and move them on very well from their prior level of understanding or development.

This is the case across all of the national curriculum and the gamut of social, communication and emotional aspects of pupils' development and learning. Outcomes of assessments are used very well by you, your leadership team and governors to check if pupils are achieving highly against their aspirational targets. Action is taken quickly if any pupil is at risk of falling behind. Consequently, governors have a very good understanding of how well pupils and groups of pupils are achieving over time. They keep a watchful eye on disadvantaged pupils' progress to make sure that the pupil premium funding is well spent. Information that they receive shows that these pupils achieve at least as well as their peers. Discussions with governors and minutes from their committee meetings show that governors continue to challenge you and other leaders to make sure that this is always the case. Although your reports to governors on such matters are very comprehensive, the pupil premium report on the school's website is not as clear.

I also wanted to check if the quality of teaching and learning was still outstanding. Highly skilled staff, including teachers, support staff, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists, work together successfully to ensure that the complex and diverse needs of the pupils are expertly met and to ensure that pupils progress highly in their learning and development. Very occasionally, the most able pupils are not sufficiently stretched in lessons. This happens when they spend a long time on one activity, when they could have moved more quickly onto another.

Pupils' personal and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development continues to be a shining light across the school. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning in classrooms and at social times improve brilliantly during their time at Gibside, and the support for pupils and for families in times of need is second to none. Parents are highly positive about the education, safety and care provided to their children. Partnerships with them are also very strong. One family's written comments to the inspection survey echoed those of all when they reported:

'Since joining, our son has progressed so much. We have a good relationship with school, as well as supporting our son they also support us as a family. They really do care about the children and work hard to help them achieve to the best of their abilities. Our son loves school. As parents we couldn't be happier because he is happy and is doing so well here.'

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are detailed and of high quality. Staff have all received up-to-date training, are well informed and know exactly what to do should they identify any safeguarding or child protection concerns. You take robust action if any slips in procedures occur. The designated safeguarding lead refers serious concerns in a timely and appropriate way to any of the myriad of agencies you work with to help keep pupils safe. The family support worker works swiftly to identify, and then follow up, any pupil absences or children at risk of going missing. She supports families sensitively in times of need so that issues can be tackled quickly before

things escalate too much. The recently appointed safeguarding governor has improved the arrangements to hold you all to account for your safeguarding work. She checks procedures to ensure that they are as watertight as possible and in line with the most recent government requirements.

### **Inspection findings**

- You, your senior team, staff and governors are extremely ambitious for the pupils in your care. Collectively, you have been very successful in maintaining, and then building on, the significant strengths evident at the time of the last inspection.
- Systems to check the impact of the work of the school have been developed further and are rigorous. Consequently, you, senior leaders and governors have a very clear view of the strengths and areas that need further development. Rapid action is taken when you fall short of your high expectations. For example, recently, governors identified that the school improvement plan needed sharper targets against which they could hold you and other leaders to account. You have already started to take action to tackle this. Governors are also working with you to improve the quality of the pupil premium report on the school's website.
- Regular checks on the quality of teaching and learning mean that you and your senior team have a very accurate view of their quality. Training opportunities and support plans help to tackle any weaker areas so that all teaching remains as good as the best. You constantly look outwards to learn from the best. For example, you work closely with other schools to moderate your judgements of teaching and learning and to share good practice. You also work closely with a local university to learn from the most current research regarding the specialist provisions in school and the diverse range of your pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Superb relationships between staff and pupils pervade the school's work. Staff work skilfully together to tackle pupils' individual barriers to learning. Pupils benefit from the highly individualised activities provided to meet their needs. Staff know their pupils very well and are vigilant in planning activities that entice pupils to take part in their learning and communication development successfully. Very occasionally, the most able pupils are not stretched as well as they could be.
- Children in the early years make good progress from their starting points because of the recently developed high-quality provision, care, good teaching and leadership. Children develop their skills in perseverance and trying their best, which will stand them in good stead as they move through the school.
- Sensitive, timely, subtle and calm interventions from staff help pupils to get back on track when they lose concentration or are facing a particular challenge. This maximises opportunities for them to take part in their learning and also ensures that lessons are not disrupted unduly by any challenging incidents.
- Pupils' behaviour is a credit to the school and to the pupils themselves. Many overcome significant challenges successfully because of the care taken to understand and then manage their complex behavioural, social and communication needs. Transitions throughout key points in time each day are carefully planned. Systematic routines, often through familiar songs and music,

help diminish the anxiety of pupils who have autistic spectrum disorder as they move seamlessly through the wide range of well-planned activities and the curriculum on offer.

- Pupils benefit from a broad curriculum that is enriched by many visits out of school. Basic skills of literacy and numeracy are systematically taught and pitched at the right level for each pupil. Reading is promoted at every opportunity. A rich array of reading books line the corridors and entice pupils into sharing books with staff. Vibrant displays of famous authors and nursery rhymes help to ensure that reading is a high priority in school. The curriculum, including personal, social, health and cultural education, assemblies, high-quality therapies and individual one-to-one support, enables pupils to develop their confidence, self-esteem and the life skills they will need as they move to their next schools.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most able pupils are challenged consistently to make sure that they can make the best possible progress in their learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Margaret Farrow  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, inspectors reviewed a range of school documentation. This included documents relating to the safeguarding of pupils, the school's improvement plan and your written evaluation of the school's work. Inspectors also reviewed records of any accidents, incidents of misbehaviour and current and past information on pupils' learning and progress. Inspectors visited lessons with you and other leaders across a range of subjects and activities and reviewed pupils' work in work folders, books and online assessments. One inspector visited the early years provision in Blaydon. Inspectors talked to pupils during the day, including at breaktimes and lunchtime. Meetings were held with you, senior and middle leaders, staff and six representatives from the governing body. A meeting was also held with the school's improvement adviser from Gateshead local authority. I took account of the 23 parental responses to the Ofsted inspection survey, Parent View, and the 14 written comments provided by them. I also took account of the 77 responses to the staff survey and the 16 responses to the pupil survey.