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Mr David Erskine
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Dear Mr Erskine

Short inspection of Southlands School

Following my visit to the school on 4 April 2017 with Ofsted Inspector Chris Campbell, 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 November 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 have not rested on your laurels. You have tackled the areas that required attention at the last inspection and have continued to drive improvement across the school's work. You, your leaders, staff and governors actively live out your shared ambitions 'to promote confidence, security and achievement for every individual' and 'to prepare pupils successfully for an active and purposeful role in society'. Pupils enjoy school, settle in quickly, attend well and thrive in the nurturing atmosphere of respect, trust and care. All pupils rise to the high expectations you have of their behaviour and conduct, because they know they are valued whatever their special educational needs and/or disabilities. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about their children's safety, care, learning and progress. Parents are equally positive about the very good relationships between home and school.

At the time of the last inspection, you were asked to improve the systems for tracking pupils' progress in order to better meet pupils' needs in some classes. I wanted to check this and to see if teaching was still good and enabling pupils to achieve well. Teaching is good. Improved systems mean you now have very clear baseline information on pupils' skills and abilities on entry into school. Teachers generally use this assessment information well, to plan learning that moves pupils on from what they already know and understand in English, mathematics and science. You and other leaders know, because of your regular monitoring of learning, that occasionally, the most able pupils are given work that is too easy for

them. Sometimes, teachers accept poor handwriting without challenge. Your senior team is working with staff to tackle these issues. You are also aware that while you have 'cracked' assessment in the main subjects of English, mathematics and science, there is some way to go to have an equally rigorous approach to other subjects in the curriculum.

Staff work well together and develop highly positive relationships with pupils. Together, you all ensure that the diverse social, emotional and mental health needs of pupils are met successfully. Consequently, pupils behave well and achieve well during their time at Southlands. Pupils' successes and achievements are celebrated through the vibrant displays that adorn corridors and classrooms. There are many examples of successes in writing. This was the weakest area last year and staff have refocused their attention on this area effectively. Displays showcase the very broad curriculum and wide range of exciting and interesting activities that pupils take part in within the school day and beyond.

Governors are enthusiastic and hold you to account robustly for the impact of the school's work. They monitor your actions closely and provide very strong challenge when they find things need to be better. For example, through their monitoring they found that homework was too patchy. As a result, you have taken their concerns on board and are improving its use and effectiveness.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Leaders have made sure that all staff and governors have up-to-date safeguarding and child protection training. They are surveyed to check their understanding of different types of concern and how to respond to them. Leaders make sure that any cause for concern is sent to the designated lead for safeguarding in a timely manner. He tracks these concerns carefully and makes rapid referrals to children's social care or the local authority's designated lead for safeguarding when needed. The changed role of the school mentor means she has much more time to support pupils and families in times of need. Very close partnership working has been developed with other services and agencies. This helps to ensure that early help is provided to families before problems get too much, and before pupils' attendance slips or their well-being becomes a risk.

Inspection findings

- Pupils arrive at Southlands with a range of complex needs. Careful assessment of these needs identifies the right support and provision to enable pupils to achieve well and make a success of their time in school. At the heart of this success are the very positive, rewarding relationships that are developed between staff and pupils. The care and support provided is second to none and is a significant contributing factor to the development of pupils' confidence and self-esteem. This enables them to enjoy school and to apply themselves to their learning.
- I came to the inspection wanting to find out if leadership was still good and

found this to be the case. Leadership continues to improve and you have made sure that the school will thrive when you leave. The acting headteacher leads the school two days a week to aid the smooth transition of leadership. He has brought with him added rigour to the way leaders check the school's work to drive improvement further.

- Leadership has also been strengthened with the appointment of an acting deputy headteacher and additional roles and responsibilities allocated to staff. Middle and subject leaders are now fully involved in helping you to check the impact of everyone's work. Staff value the additional responsibilities they now have and the way they contribute more widely to the school's improvement priorities.
- Arrangements to manage staff performance are now more rigorous. This has helped to improve the quality of teaching across the school and its impact on pupils' learning. Targeted training and professional development opportunities have also contributed to these improvements. Your aspiration is that all teaching is outstanding, so that all pupils achieve their fullest potential. You know that there are still aspects that need to improve. For example, most-able pupils need to be provided with work that challenges them consistently to achieve their best.
- You and your team have developed systems to track pupils' progress in English, mathematics and science successfully. On the whole, staff use this information well to plan interesting tasks that move pupils on successfully in their learning. However, systems to assess other subjects are not as helpful in identifying how well pupils are doing and then enabling teachers to plan work that is matched to pupils' prior skills and knowledge. Leaders check pupils' progress in their books regularly, but do not always check if pupils' handwriting is improving over time.
- The high expectations you all have regarding behaviour and the consistent, positive and skilful way that staff manage potential incidents means that pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning are good.
- The broad and engaging curriculum and the values of trust, care and respect build pupils' confidence, independence and self-esteem. Together with the good progress they make in their learning, they help pupils to develop the personal qualities that stand them in good stead as they move on to life after school.
- Pupils' next steps are enhanced well by the wide range of vocational, work-related, 'hands-on' experiences they take part in through the 'Moving On' project. This project enables pupils to work with pupils from other schools, or the local college and work-based providers. They learn to mix well with people from all walks of life and pupils from a variety of other schools and settings.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- systems to track pupils' progress and achievements in the broader curriculum are as effective as those for English, mathematics and science
- teachers challenge pupils' poor presentation where appropriate and help them to improve their handwriting skills

- teachers use the information they have about pupils' current skills and abilities to consistently challenge the most able pupils to achieve their best.

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

Yours sincerely

Margaret Farrow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors visited a number of classes with two of your senior leaders to observe learning and behaviour and to review pupils' workbooks. We held meetings with you, senior leaders, staff and four representatives of the governing body. A discussion was also held with the local authority's school development partner. We talked informally to pupils in lessons and at breaktime. The views of the 83 parents who completed Parent View, the Ofsted inspection questionnaire, were taken into account. We also considered the text comments made by five of these parents. A range of documents were scrutinised, including documents relating to your safeguarding procedures, the written evaluation of your work and information on the progress pupils make over time. Your regular reports to governors and minutes of governing body meetings were also checked.