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Mr Andrew Bennett
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Bennett

Short inspection of Ovingham Middle School

Following my visit to the school on 6 June 2017 with Stephen McKenzie, Ofsted Inspector, 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 December 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. There has been a number of changes in staff and governance since that time, including your arrival as headteacher in January 2015. You have developed a strong team of staff who are working with you effectively to build on the strengths already in place upon your arrival and to ensure that pupils thrive during their time in Ovingham. You are supported well by the governing body. Governors have raised their game since the last inspection. They are well informed about the school's work. They use their collective knowledge and skills to hold you to account effectively for the impact of the school's work on pupils' learning and development.

Work to promote pupils' personal, emotional, social, moral, spiritual and cultural development remains a strength. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They attend school regularly and are articulate and friendly. Their attitudes to learning are first rate. There was a real sense of community and of pupils' support, respect and care for one another as we conducted our inspection activities.

You and your senior team have, in the main, addressed the areas that required improvement at the last inspection. For example, the quality of teaching is improving because this has been at the forefront of your strategy to ensure that all pupils make the best possible progress from their starting points in Year 5. Training and coaching of staff as well as sharper arrangements to manage their performance are contributing to the improvements in the quality of teaching across the curriculum. Such actions are also contributing to improvements in the rates of

pupils' progress by the time they leave Year 8. Teachers have become more adept in developing pupils' independence skills and enabling them to 'have a go' and work things out for themselves. This was an area that required improvement at the time of the last inspection. Occasionally, teaching assistants help pupils too much. This happens when teachers have set work for the supported pupil that is not at their current level of understanding.

You, other leaders and governors, have a good knowledge of what is working well and what needs to improve. For example, last year you found that although pupils' attainment was above average in the Year 6 national tests, the progress these pupils made from key stage 1 was not good enough, particularly in mathematics and for middle-ability disadvantaged pupils. Actions taken this year, including training for teachers, individual support to pupils and small-group work are diminishing the differences between disadvantaged pupils' progress and that of their peers in school effectively. This is especially the case by the end of Year 8 when pupils have been at Ovingham for the full four years.

The recently appointed special educational needs coordinator is providing strong leadership. Strategies she has developed along with support to, and training of, staff are diminishing last year's differences in the progress of pupils who require additional support for their special educational needs and/or disabilities and other pupils in school effectively. It is too soon to see the full impact of this work.

Assessment systems to check and track pupils' learning and progress over time have been developed and improved over the last year. Staff usually use this information to plan work that moves pupils on well from their individual starting points in class. However, you know that on occasions, the most able pupils are not challenged to achieve their best consistently in lessons. This is an ongoing priority. Occasionally, in some lessons, teachers do not challenge poorly presented work. However, teachers in all subjects check pupils' spelling, grammar and punctuation regularly and, as a result, pupils' skills and knowledge are improving well.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The recent external audit of the school's safeguarding procedures has sharpened up practice and made sure that all procedures, including recruitment procedures, are robust. Leaders have ensured a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. The designated lead for safeguarding and the nominated safeguarding governor meet regularly and provide strong oversight of arrangements. Staff are trained in all aspects of child protection and safeguarding. Alongside statutory training, staff also receive regular updates to keep abreast of emerging guidance from the Department for Education and risks emerging locally or nationally. Staff respond quickly to any concerns that they identify. Leaders work closely with external agencies so that pupils are safeguarded. They ensure that pupils and their families get the right help and support in times of great need. Pupils report confidently that they are safe in school and are taught well to understand risks to their personal safety. They value highly the school counsellor who, along with any adult, they can turn to with any concern.

Inspection findings

- I wanted to check the extent to which leaders have improved the effectiveness of school improvement planning since the last inspection. Your insightful and accurate evaluation of the school's work identifies clearly the strengths and areas that need further attention. Weaker areas have informed an appropriate set of time-specific actions and measures of success in the school's improvement plan. Action plans are monitored robustly by governors and the senior team to make sure they are having the desired effect.
- Regular checks on individual pupils' and groups of pupils' attendance shows that actions taken this year have reduced the proportion of pupils absent for long periods successfully. Persistent absence rates have fallen from above average to below average for all groups of pupils. Attendance rates are above average. Current information indicates that attendance rates for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are around 2% points above that found last year. This represents strong improvement and this was also an area that I wanted to check.
- You have developed your own skills and those of other leaders in checking the quality of teaching and pupils' learning effectively. Regular lesson observations, checks on pupils' workbooks and formal assessments of pupils' work are being used to identify how well pupils are achieving across the curriculum. Any pupil at risk of falling behind is identified quickly and additional support is now put in place to help them catch up to where they should be. Such work is diminishing the differences between disadvantaged pupils' progress and other pupils' progress in mathematics and in writing, particularly in key stage 3. However, you know there is still work to do to diminish differences further in key stage 2. Your action plan identifies the work you are undertaking to improve matters. You are also taking action to ensure that the good practice in the leadership of English is shared more widely. Although leaders check the quality of work in pupils' books regularly, they do not challenge poor presentation consistently.
- The quality of teaching is improving and more pupils are making stronger progress in their learning as a result. Teaching is typified by pupils' super behaviour and attitudes and their readiness to learn. Relationships between staff and pupils are cordial. Older pupils report that they can see improvements in the teaching they receive. They report that teachers explain more clearly what pupils need to do and provide advice and guidance when they need it. Pupils enjoy the opportunities to work independently and take more responsibility for their learning. This was an area for improvement at the last inspection.
- You know, and inspection evidence shows, there is still more to do to make sure that the most able pupils are challenged consistently in class. Stronger performance management arrangements are now in place and staff are being held to account more robustly for their impact on these pupils' achievements, the achievements of disadvantaged pupils and of pupils who require additional support for their special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Walls and corridors celebrate the wide-ranging activities that pupils undertake and the good-quality work, including the art work, they produce. Pupils learn

about all major world faiths and beliefs in assemblies, religious education lessons, through the arts and visits out of school. The wide range of extra-curricular activities and the focus on developing pupils' creativity broadens pupils' horizons and energises learning. The expansive curriculum, along with significant charity work and work exploring the 'United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child', supports pupils' good understanding of their roles as global citizens. Such opportunities also prepare pupils well for their lives as tolerant, respectful citizens in modern Britain.

- Governors have addressed the weaknesses in aspects of their effectiveness identified at the time of the last inspection. They work closely with you to develop the school's improvement plans and to check the difference actions are making. Governors visit school regularly and they have developed their own skills as governors through wide-ranging training. They utilise their various skills across the governing body's work well. Governors' sharper focus on disadvantaged pupils' progress and the use of the pupil premium funding provides an ongoing challenge to you and staff. This focus is contributing to the diminishing differences between the progress disadvantaged pupils and other pupils make in school. Evaluative reviews of the school's work undertaken by the local authority's school improvement adviser contribute to the good understanding governors now have about the school's work.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers use the information they have about pupils' starting points in lessons to make sure the most able pupils are challenged consistently to achieve their best
- work planned for pupils being supported by teaching assistants is pitched at the right level and teaching assistants give pupils time to work things out and only intervene when necessary
- poorly presented pupils' work is challenged consistently.

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

Yours sincerely

Margaret Farrow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you to discuss the impact of the actions you are taking to continue to improve the school and to safeguard pupils. Inspectors observed learning across the school, looked at pupils' workbooks and talked to pupils about their learning while in lessons. You accompanied me to four lessons. Inspectors

talked to pupils at breaktime to secure their views of the school. Inspectors held meetings with four representatives of the governing body, a group middle leaders and a group of staff. I spoke to your local authority school improvement adviser. I took account of 66 responses to the Ofsted staff survey. Inspectors scrutinised a number of documents, including safeguarding documents, the school's written evaluation of its work, improvement plans, recent headteacher's reports to governors and minutes from recent governing body meetings.