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Mrs Derryth Hope
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Dear Mrs Hope

Short inspection of Berwick Middle School

Following my visit to the school on 29 November 2017 with Ofsted Inspector, Jo Suddes, 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 October 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Leaders' accurate self-evaluation and incisive school development plan confirm why the school is still good. Both documents are realistic and recognise aspects of the school that need to be strengthened further.

Leaders' actions have demonstrated improvements, which have led to the good outcomes being sustained and, in some instances, improved over recent years. The school has a very friendly and hardworking environment and pupils are taught very well across a range of different subjects that the curriculum offers. Additionally, pupils benefit from being taught in specialist music, technology, science and physical education areas by specialist teachers.

Leaders have focused appropriately since the previous inspection on improving the quality of teaching across the school. As a result, teaching continues to improve and there is a strong, tangible ethos of learning in classrooms. Teachers plan activities skilfully to ensure that little learning time is wasted. Pupils' attitudes to their learning are exemplary, and they show enthusiasm and engagement in all they do. Pupils work together extremely well and, as a result, support and develop each other's learning and confidence.

Staff have very good relationships with pupils and know them well as individuals. As a result, pupils' academic and pastoral developments are well catered for. Staff work hard to ensure that pupils access a well-rounded education and a wide range

of extra-curricular activities. Pupils enjoy being part of sporting activities, writing and reading competitions and being involved in the annual school musical. Staff also plan a range of exciting trips, including a recent visit to London. As a result of these extra-curricular activities on offer, pupils develop their confidence well. One girl said, 'All pupils are happy and proud to be a part of the school.'

Governors make a vital contribution to the leadership of the school and the quality of education that pupils receive. As a group, they have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and the most important priorities in order to improve. Governors are consistently evaluative and they ensure that additional funding is spent shrewdly and, importantly, that it is having a positive impact on pupils' outcomes and experiences. They are a real asset to the school.

Leaders' drive to continuously strengthen and improve aspects of the quality of teaching across the school is a constant theme. However, leaders and governors are clear that there are still aspects of the school's work that need to be improved. Leaders recognise that more pupils, based on their starting points, should achieve at a higher standard and at greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stages 2 and 3. School leaders also acknowledge that, while the newly appointed special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) is having a rapid impact on improving the provision, the special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities provision across the school, and in the Bridges centre, needs to be more consistent so that it is having a demonstrable impact on improving this group of pupils' outcomes and attendance.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have created a culture of safeguarding across the school. Pupils said that they feel safe and that there is an adult in the school whom they trust to speak to if they have a problem or are worried about something.

The curriculum helps pupils to learn about any risks they may face, for example using the internet and social media. Pupils are very confident that poor behaviour, including bullying, is extremely rare and, if it does occur, it is dealt with quickly and effectively by a member of staff. Most parents support the view that the school ensures that pupils are well behaved.

Pupils are well supervised at school, including at break and lunchtimes. Pupils are very happy at the school and their conduct in and around the school site is excellent.

Inspection findings

- At the time of the previous inspection, you were asked to improve the consistency in aspects of teaching across the school. These aspects have been addressed with considerable success. Inspection evidence indicates that teaching is consistently strong across the school and that current pupils are making good progress across a range of subjects, particularly in mathematics. Teachers'

subject knowledge is used skilfully to plan learning that engages and challenges pupils' thinking and develops their knowledge and understanding. Teachers also skilfully plan learning activities to meet the varying needs of pupils. Because of this, no pupil is left behind in their learning.

- Mathematics teaching is now a strength of the school. This was particularly evident in Year 5. Pupils independently assessed where they were in their understanding of how to calculate the perimeter of rectilinear shapes. Pupils either consolidated or extended their understanding; teaching ensured that any pupils that were unclear were not left behind. A buzz of engagement, focus and learning, along with a 'can do' attitude, permeated the room as it does the school.
- The innovative use of professional development for staff has been well received and is appreciated by staff. Staff are given a wide range of opportunities to be reflective, to learn from each other and to share good practice. As a result of such opportunities, the quality of teaching is continuously improving.
- Leadership has strengthened since the previous inspection, especially middle leadership. Middle leaders know the school's priorities for improvement well. They are vigorous in their approach and they are passionate that all pupils achieve their very best. Middle leaders work effectively together as a team. They collectively track and monitor pupils' progress, develop teaching and learning and are ambitious to improve pupils' attendance. They are supportive of each other and highly reflective. As a group, they are at the forefront of providing both academic and pastoral support for pupils in the school.
- An area we looked at during the inspection was how effectively the school develops pupils' writing skills. In 2017, Year 6 pupils' progress in writing was well below the national average. We found that leaders have worked swiftly to ensure that current pupils, in both key stages 2 and 3, receive a much wider range and breadth of opportunities to write in different subjects.
- The head of English is leading on improving writing. Not only is she effectively monitoring the standards of writing across the curriculum, but is also providing bespoke support to teachers so they are confident to teach the various stylistic demands of different written genres. As a result of this focused work, current pupils are making much stronger progress in their writing. From the wide range of books inspectors scrutinised, it is evident that pupils are benefiting from practising their writing in different subjects, for different audiences and different purposes. Whole-school moderation of writing, across a range of subjects, is now a regular feature and, because of this, standards are rising quickly.
- Where teachers are giving feedback to pupils, which they do consistently and in line with the school's policy, it allows pupils to improve and extend their writing. As a result, pupils make much stronger improvements in their knowledge and skills of different genres of writing.
- Another area we looked at during the inspection was the extent to which the curriculum meets the needs of pupils in key stage 3 in order to prepare them for the next stage in their education. We found that leaders and governors show a firm commitment to providing a curriculum that has enough breadth and depth.

They have provided enough teaching time for pupils to achieve well in all subject and for all pupils to acquire the necessary knowledge, understanding and skills in preparation for the next stage in their education. As a result of strong teaching over time and a broad and balanced curriculum on offer, current key stage 3 pupils are making good progress across the curriculum.

- Throughout the inspection, we also examined and discussed the attendance and persistent absenteeism of pupils in the school. Current attendance is broadly in line with this time last year, and overall attendance is broadly in line with the national average. However, we found that persistent absenteeism remains a stubborn issue. This is particularly the case for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Leaders can explain the strategies they put in place last year and how these have been sharpened this year so that more appropriate support is provided for some identified pupils to attend school regularly. The impact of this support is yet to be fully evaluated.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- they continue to strengthen the quality of teaching across the school so that work challenges pupils further so more can achieve at a higher standard or greater depth in key stages 2 and 3
- they continue to support the newly appointed SENCo in her work to strengthen the consistency of the provision for pupils, including those who attend the Bridges centre, and that persistent absenteeism reduces swiftly for this group of pupils.

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

Darren Stewart
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors held meetings with you, other school leaders, governors and various groups of pupils. We observed pupils' learning in a series of visits to a number of lessons, and all of these visits were conducted jointly with members of the school's leadership team. We evaluated the progress and learning of pupils by scrutinising a wide range of current pupils' books. We reviewed a range of school documentation, including policies, the school's self-evaluation document and improvement plan, safeguarding records and information from assessments of pupils' achievement. We also reviewed information relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance. We scrutinised the school's single central register. An inspector visited the Bridges

centre to observe and evaluate the work being undertaken in this on-site provision. We considered the views of 41 parents who completed Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 30 free-text responses.