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Mr John Barnes  
Executive Headteacher  
Seaton Sluice Middle School  
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Seaton Sluice  
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Dear Mr Barnes

### **Short inspection of Seaton Sluice Middle School**

Following my visit to the school on 31 January 2018 with Moira Banks, 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 January 2013.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since taking your role of executive headteacher in September 2015, you have provided strong and steadfast leadership, which has driven the development of the school. Along with your head of school, leaders and governors, you have accurately identified the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. Leaders and governors look to maximise the opportunities of working across the Seaton Valley Federation of schools to further improve pupils' outcomes at Seaton Sluice Middle School. The school's detailed self-evaluation and improvement plan clearly identify the priorities for improving the school further.

Leaders, staff and governors have largely tackled the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. They have also maintained the previously identified strengths. For example, you and your staff work hard to develop the quality of teaching and to improve pupils' outcomes. Leaders research effective approaches for improving teaching. They are outward-looking and use training from within the federation and partnership schools and beyond the local authority. Leaders have refined approaches to staff performance management. Regular checks identify where staff need professional development or individualised support to develop their teaching skills. Staff agree that leaders use professional development to encourage, challenge and support their improvement.

The previous school inspection identified the need to provide more opportunities for pupils to engage in problem-solving activities, especially in mathematics. Recent

developments – including staff training and the introduction of new resources – to improve the teaching of reasoning and problem-solving in mathematics are beginning to have a positive impact. This improvement is evident in the majority of pupils' books and the school's tracking of current pupils' progress in mathematics. However, there is more work to be done to embed these developments. This is needed to ensure that pupils' outcomes, including the attainment of disadvantaged pupils, in mathematics improve by the end of key stage 2.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You, your staff and governors give the highest priority to keeping pupils safe and there is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. They carry out appropriate checks for all staff, governors and volunteers. Staff and governors receive regular and appropriate training so they know how to keep pupils safe, including training about how to protect pupils from radicalisation and extremism. Consequently, staff and governors understand the safeguarding procedures and their own responsibilities. You have good links with other agencies and parents and carers to ensure prompt and timely responses to any safeguarding concerns.

Your pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including when they are online. They know the different forms that bullying can take and are confident that staff will help them if they ever have concerns. They appreciate the support from other pupils who act as 'bully busters' on the playground. During the inspection, Year 7 pupils demonstrated their understanding of bullying and made insightful contributions when involved in an anti-bullying workshop delivered by an external provider. Discussions with your pupils highlight that they feel safe in school and that your curriculum helps them to understand how to adopt healthy lifestyles, for example understanding the risks involved with drugs and alcohol.

### **Inspection findings**

- You, your leaders and staff have responded promptly to the dip in pupils' outcomes at the end of key stage 2 in 2017. You have analysed the factors for these results and subsequently made changes to the teaching of reading, spelling and mathematics. You have also taken steps to develop pupils' stamina and resilience when completing assessments. The school's pupils' progress information indicates that the vast majority of current pupils across the school, including those in key stage 2, are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. However, the attainment of disadvantaged pupils still lags behind that of other pupils within school and nationally.
- Effective use has been made of interventions in reading and mathematics where Year 7 pupils are not working at the expected standard at the beginning of the year. This additional work helps the majority of pupils catch up within the first term of Year 7.
- The leader for English has a good understanding of the priorities for improvement. She has worked effectively with leaders from other schools to research and develop the school's approach to improve the teaching of spelling

and reading. These initiatives align well with the school's priorities. The leader for English takes steps to check the impact of initiatives. However, it is too early to determine fully the impact of these recent developments on pupils' outcomes.

- The leader for mathematics has analysed the 2017 key stage 2 mathematics assessments. She has then taken action to develop the teaching of reasoning, problem-solving and fractions. There is evidence in pupils' books that most teachers are beginning to cover this work well. However, there is more to do to embed these approaches.
- Leaders have strategies in place to improve disadvantaged pupils' outcomes that are having some impact. In the main, these pupils make similar progress to other pupils in school. However, disadvantaged pupils' attainment at the end of Year 6, particularly in mathematics, lags behind that of other pupils nationally. Furthermore, the persistent absence of some of these pupils remains too high.
- Overall behaviour across the school is very good. Leaders and staff set pupils clear expectations and make effective use of the school's behaviour management systems, including the merits rewards. Pupils engage well in lessons, are pleased to share their learning and work collaboratively with their peers. Pupils behave well at lunchtimes and breaktimes, socialising well with friends. Movement between lessons is orderly and pupils arrive promptly and ready to work hard.
- Since the last inspection, fixed-term exclusion rates have been above the averages found nationally. Leaders and governors monitor this situation carefully and recently there has been a gradual fall in exclusions. The school's records show that leaders and staff follow the guidelines in the behaviour policy and adopt a structured approach to addressing any concerns about pupils' behaviour. Support for pupils who return from exclusion ensures that for most this is a 'one off' occurrence.
- Governors have a good understanding of the school's priorities and the community the school serves. They are ambitious to secure the best outcomes for pupils and they provide fitting support and robust challenge to leaders.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school's strategies to improve pupils' outcomes, particularly in mathematics at the end of key stage 2, are fully embedded, so that the school's progress and attainment outcomes at least match the averages found nationally
- the pupil premium funding has a more direct impact on improving disadvantaged pupils' attainment and reduces the persistent absence where this is too high for some of these 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

Michael Reeves  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this one-day inspection, I discussed the work of the school with you and your head of school. I also held meetings with the leaders for English and mathematics. Inspectors observed and spoke with pupils during playtime and at other times during the day. I held a meeting with a representative from the local authority. I met with four governors, including the chair of the governing body, who were able to provide me with additional information. I took into account school documentation, assessment information, policies and information posted on the school's website. I considered the 26 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I reviewed the 23 responses to the staff survey and the one response to the pupil survey. Inspectors visited 10 classes to observe teaching and learning. Four of these observations in lessons were completed with you. Inspectors looked at pupils' English, mathematics and science work to help evaluate the quality of teaching and learning over time. They reviewed information relating to governance, safeguarding, behaviour, exclusions and bullying.