

16 March 2018

Mrs Donna Walker
Acting Headteacher
The Link School Tudor Grove
Portland Road
Sunderland
Tyne and Wear
SR3 1SS

Dear Mrs Walker

Short inspection of The Link School Tudor Grove

Following my visit to the school on 21 February 2018 with David Penny, 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 2012.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Since your recent appointment as acting headteacher, you have driven the school forward with vision and purpose. You are focused on the needs of the school and understand and identify clearly the areas for improvement that are necessary. You have put many improvement measures in place. While it is too soon to see the full impact of these measures, you have put in place foundations to support improving outcomes for pupils with consistent application over time.

You manage and lead effectively and inspire colleagues to share high aspirations for the school. Staff talk about the positive changes that you have brought about. They feel very well supported and are proud to work at the school. Your expectations of staff are high, and you provide effective support, guidance and training to improve their skills, knowledge and practice. Staff feel appreciated and comment that you are quick to respond to requests for support, for example they now have regular well-being and mental health awareness sessions.

There has been significant increase in pupil numbers and changes to the pupil profile. The school now admits pupils with more complex social, emotional and mental health needs. These pupils are also attending the school for longer periods of time until they can be moved to mainstream or special schools. You have responded to these changes by altering your staffing structure. By reassessing skills,

you have placed staff in positions where they can support pupils in the most effective way. Pupils have responded well and report that they feel happy and receive appropriate support when they need it.

Pupils are now accurately assessed on entry to the school and you have implemented regular assessment.

Governors are effective and realistic, understanding the changes the school has been through and the turbulent effects of this change. They bring a range of knowledge and skills which they use to challenge you and your senior leaders. They are proactive in their support. Governors are ambitious for the pupils of the school and are focused on providing high-quality outcomes for them.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have made sure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are detailed and of high quality. The required checks are made on adults employed to work with children. Staff receive regular and effective training and are up to date with current legislation. They are secure in spotting the signs where a child may potentially be at risk. They are clear and confident on procedures they must follow if they have any concerns. You have created a safeguarding culture in which all staff see it as their responsibility to keep children safe.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They talk about the lessons they have had around keeping safe and online protection. Pupils can identify their 'trusted person' and know that they can also speak to a number of adults around school if they need to.

The school works well with other agencies, including the local authority. Records show a thorough recording of safeguarding concerns. Any concerns are dealt with effectively and are followed up to ensure a positive outcome.

Pupils report that although they understand the need for physical intervention, they do not like it. Some report that this is the part of school that they dislike.

Inspection findings

- Pupils who remain at the school for longer periods of time settle more quickly to their work. They understand the support that is in place to help them succeed. Pupils can identify that the school meets their needs.
- Pupils engage well and with enthusiasm where lessons are interesting and interactive. They make substantial gains in sustaining their concentration and motivation where practical tasks are used. This does not happen consistently enough throughout the school and in some lessons pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable due to a lack of engagement or enthusiasm.
- Teachers do not consistently demonstrate high expectations for pupils in their learning. The variation in this means that pupils are not always challenged in their lessons. Some teachers do not use assessment information accurately and

therefore are not consistent in planning accurately pitched lessons for each pupil.

- Staff have high expectations for behaviour in lessons and around school. Most pupils enter classrooms ready to learn. Pupils who struggle to settle accept support readily from the highly trained and experienced staff. New initiatives are consolidating the importance of learning to pupils.
- Pupils are sometimes encouraged to work independently; however, opportunities for this are not consistent and staff appear reluctant to allow pupils to try for themselves. Pupils are not always encouraged to take risks in order to build resilience.
- Data-tracking systems and assessment practice do not accurately show pupils' progress. There are some inconsistencies in the data produced and some members of the senior leadership team do not accurately know how to interpret the school's data.
- You have identified that although pupil premium spend is well documented and outcomes are outlined, the impact of this spending is not clear and has not been tracked. You have put in place systems to ensure that the impact of future pupil premium spending is evident.
- Attendance at the school is below the national average. You have implemented a variety of ways to improve school attendance; however, this has not yet shown the marked improvement that you require.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers stretch and challenge pupils further by using assessment information accurately
- attendance is addressed further, particularly persistent absentees in key stage 3
- teachers plan engaging and motivational lessons to enthuse and motivate pupils in all curriculum areas
- the progress and performance data that leaders provide is clear and insightful and helps to support pupils' progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Sara Roe
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection we carried out a range of activities to gather information on the key lines of enquiry. We had meetings with yourself and a number of other school leaders. We visited classrooms and observed seven lessons with a member of the senior leadership team. We looked at school tracking systems of pupils' progress and several other data sets regarding attendance, behaviour and exclusion. We met with two governors, two members of the local authority, spoke to two parents and spoke to a group of pupils. Four responses were made to Parent View and 18 staff surveys were considered. A number of documents, including the school's evaluation of its work, minutes from governing body meetings and the school improvement plan, were scrutinised.