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Graham Roser
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Dear Mr Roser

Short inspection of Tor Bridge High

Following my visit to the school on 13 March 2018 with Marie Hunter and Julie Nash, Ofsted Inspectors, 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 April 2015.

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 you took up post as headteacher in September, you have worked successfully to secure support from staff to introduce key improvements. You and other senior leaders relish your work. This contagious enthusiasm is having a positive effect on the attitudes of staff, pupils and parents towards school. You work in an open, collegiate manner that encourages staff to 'step up', share ideas and feel valued.

Leaders are aware of the school's weaknesses and readily acknowledge that improvement is required in certain areas. To this end, leaders have set about implementing changes since the beginning of the academic year to improve the quality of teaching. However, these changes are recent and not yet fully established. Consequently, it is not possible to determine their impact fully. Furthermore, leaders are not checking rigorously enough that the initiatives they have introduced to improve teaching are being applied by all staff in their day-to-day practice.

Leaders take an honest, open approach to self-evaluation. They have identified key weaknesses, such as the underachievement of the most able and disadvantaged pupils. However, in certain cases, leaders have not fully evaluated weaknesses to

discover their root causes. This means that improvement plans are not as effective as they should be because they are not based on a sufficiently precise analysis of the evidence.

The school improvement partner is providing effective support to the school. Since she started working with leaders in September, she has made regular visits. Her expertise has helped you to make beneficial changes to improve leadership and teaching. Governors are also a useful support to you. They bring different skills and experience to their work and you welcome the assistance and challenge they provide. Nevertheless, governors acknowledge that they do not have as detailed an understanding of the progress made by different groups of pupils as they should.

Leaders and the wider staff are nurturing an open and positive school culture in which all pupils are welcome and accepted. Pupils who spoke with me said they feel happy in school because of the positive atmosphere and the care they receive from staff. As one pupil said, 'A lot of the teachers are really open-minded and accepting.' Staff have also worked successfully to develop a constructive relationship with parents and the local community. This explains why the school is over-subscribed. The large majority of parents who responded to the Parent View survey are satisfied with various aspects of the school's work and would recommend the school.

At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed on the key lines of enquiry to be considered during the day. These included establishing the effectiveness of leaders' actions to raise the achievement of pupils, including those who are most able and those who are disadvantaged. We also considered the extent to which absence and exclusions are reducing, and whether safeguarding is effective. These lines of enquiry are considered below where they have not already been referred to.

Safeguarding is effective.

The designated team of staff responsible for child protection consists of appropriately trained staff who know their responsibilities well. They have carried out an audit of safeguarding and ensured that all procedures and practices are in place and fit for purpose. Other staff are clear about who they should speak to and what to do should they have concerns about a child. The online referral system records concerns in detail and organises them clearly. This enables staff to track concerns closely and ensure that appropriate action is taken to support pupils. Staff work effectively with external agencies. However, where these partners are unable to provide necessary additional support for vulnerable pupils, staff within school make up the shortfall. Checks to ensure that staff are suitable to work with pupils are thorough and up to date. These are carefully overseen by a senior member of staff.

Pupils report that they feel safe in school. They say that pupils of different ages happily co-exist and there is nowhere in school they would not go. Pupils say they would readily talk to members of staff if they had any worries and that bullying is not a problem in the school. These findings are largely borne out by the pupil survey issued during the inspection.

Inspection findings

- In 2017, pupils' progress was below average in certain subjects, including mathematics and science. The progress of higher-ability pupils was also below average across most subjects. The progress of disadvantaged pupils has been below average across the curriculum for the last two years.
- Teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve, especially those pupils who are disadvantaged. Challenge for the most able is insufficient because teachers do not match work to the needs of pupils of different ability. Consequently, not enough pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, take as much pride in their work as they should.
- Teachers across the curriculum use effective subject knowledge to ask pertinent, searching questions of pupils that develop their understanding. Where teaching is most effective, such as in English, teachers use this expertise to enthuse pupils and engage them in stimulating class discussion.
- Pupils are well behaved in lessons and around the school site. They move quickly to their next lesson from the previous one, arrive promptly and are well equipped. In lessons, pupils listen to their teachers, follow instructions and generally set to the task in hand in a positive way.
- Governors acknowledge that, until the beginning of this academic year, information about the progress pupils were making was not reliable enough. Teachers' assessments of pupils' progress are still not accurate across all areas of the curriculum, although assessment practice is improving.
- Leaders' decision-making about the curriculum is informed by a moral drive to be inclusive and ensure that all pupils have access to the same opportunities. However, the curriculum does not fully recognise the particular needs of some pupils because it is not sufficiently bespoke. This means that some pupils do not achieve as well as they could in certain subjects.
- Exclusions from school have fallen over time and are now in line with the average nationally. This is because staff have made a concerted effort to work with a minority of pupils to improve their behaviour.
- Staff continue to work tirelessly to improve pupils' attendance. Historically, attendance was in line with the national average. Recently, however, it has declined. This is a source of frustration to staff, since their best efforts are not making enough of a difference for the minority of pupils who are persistently absent. This is because staff have not fully researched and taken advantage of best practice elsewhere to be sure that they are doing everything they can.
- The large majority of parents who responded to Parent View agree that their child is well taught and makes good progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leadership improves as a result of:

- leaders checking rigorously that teachers apply in practice initiatives to improve teaching in all lessons
 - senior leaders being clear about the reasons for weaknesses in aspects of the school's work, such as initiatives to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, which subsequently enables them to take more effective action
 - leaders providing a curriculum that meets the needs of all pupils
 - governors developing a detailed understanding of the progress of different groups of pupils in different subjects
- the quality of teaching improves and achievement rises as a result of:
- teachers continuing to increase the accuracy of assessment information they use to monitor pupils' progress
 - teachers having high expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - teachers setting work that meets the needs of pupils of different ability, particularly those who are most able
 - all pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, taking pride in the presentation of their work
- attendance improves as a result of:
- staff fully researching, and applying, best practice to reduce persistent absence.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, inspectors spoke with you, other senior leaders and designated safeguarding leads. We also spoke with representatives of the governing body and pupils.

Inspectors visited lessons, often jointly with staff, to observe pupils' attitudes to learning. We also scrutinised the work in pupils' books.

A range of documentary evidence was considered, which included the school's self-evaluation and school improvement plan. Inspectors considered governing body minutes, external reports and information relating to pupils' progress, behaviour, attendance and exclusion. Additionally, I scrutinised various safeguarding records, including those relating to the suitability of staff to work with children.

I took account of 82 responses to the Parent View online survey, 110 responses to the staff survey and 261 responses to the pupil survey issued during the inspection.