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Mrs Susan Winter
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Winter

Short inspection of Wellfield Middle School

Following my visit to the school on 28 March 2018 with Belita Scott HMI, 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.

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.**

The previous inspection's recommendations challenged you to improve teaching and learning in reading. You have done so successfully. You and other leaders have taken action to ensure that the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading has increased by the end of key stage 2 and is above the national average.

You were also asked to improve the quality of teaching, so that it is always good and a greater proportion is outstanding. You have introduced a new training programme, supported by other leaders, to improve the quality of teaching, and this has had a significant and positive impact on the school. There is more consistency in practice and much has improved, particularly in key stage 2. Staff value this training and are positive about developing their practice together across the school. However, you have correctly identified that this training is just beginning to raise expectations of teachers in key stage 3, so that pupils make strong gains before they transfer to high school, particularly in mathematics.

Since the previous inspection, there has been a lot of change and adjustments. A large proportion of leaders, teachers and governors are new or recently appointed. During this period of turbulence, you have maintained a calm, encouraging,

welcoming ethos across the school.

You have successfully drawn on the expertise of the local authority and a deputy headteacher from Whitley Bay High School to develop and improve leadership in the school. This has led to significant changes. However, your new leaders need time to take ownership of their recently acquired roles. While new leaders are ambitious to make improvements, they are still being strongly supported by senior leaders and external support to the school. As a result, leaders' effectiveness in securing rapid school improvement across the curriculum, for example in writing, is at an early stage. You have accurately identified that you want to build capacity in the leadership team to gather accurate and more detailed information about the quality of teaching and pupils' progress.

Governance has strengthened since the previous inspection. New governors have brought skills that support the monitoring of teaching and special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities well and ensure that the right systems are in place to hold leaders to account. Governors are regular visitors to the school. They are not afraid to challenge leaders to satisfy themselves that the provision is meeting the needs of the pupils.

You have appropriately recognised writing as an area requiring closer scrutiny. You have been disappointed by pupils' outcomes in writing, particularly those of most-able and disadvantaged pupils across school. Rates of progress for current pupils in writing remain variable. You have considered a range of approaches, for example talking about the writing topic before pupils write. Pupils' ideas are then shared to get pupils off to a good start in applying their skills more independently and to improve the quality of their writing.

Pupils work well together in lessons. They talk through problems and share their views with each other to help their understanding. They speak positively about aspects of the curriculum and especially enjoy physical education and art.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and other leaders have ensured that the arrangements to keep pupils safe are effective and fit for purpose. Staff receive the training they need and this is regularly refreshed through updates from leaders. Appropriate checks are made on the suitability of adults to work with pupils. Safeguarding records are detailed. They demonstrate leaders' effective engagement with other agencies when pupils are at risk of harm.

The positive relationships and respect that exists between adults and pupils are evidence of your work to ensure that pupils feel cared for and valued. Incidents of inappropriate behaviour have decreased. Pupils said that adults would listen if they had worries. However, you accept that the recording of behaviour incidents can be more robust to support discussion with governors.

Inspection findings

- Over the past three years, reading outcomes have improved. In 2017, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading was well above the national average. Since the previous inspection, you and other leaders have steadily improved the teaching of reading. Interventions for those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are helping them catch up with others. Leaders have drawn on research as well as internal and external expertise to more fully develop their strategies for improving outcomes in reading.
- You and your subject leader for English have rightly identified the need to improve pupils' progress in writing. Recently, you have put in place a wide range of strategies to improve the teaching of writing, particularly for creative and story writing. You have also raised the profile of writing through pupils' writing about their life experiences. During our visits to classrooms, we observed some of these approaches in action. This shows that teachers are responding well to recent training and carefully chosen resources. Leaders, including governors, agree that these approaches require further embedding in key stage 2. Leaders need to check on the impact of these developments on the quality of the teaching of writing and pupils' writing outcomes, particularly for the most-able and disadvantaged pupils.
- Teaching has improved since the previous inspection. However, the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils, in mathematics and writing in key stage 3, lags behind those of other pupils in school. Leaders, including governors, identify this as a high priority. You have rightly identified actions to accelerate disadvantaged pupils' progress in mathematics and writing within the school's pupil premium strategy. Such actions have begun to spark boys' interest, and intervention work is supporting them to prevent them from falling behind their peers.
- Challenge in terms of mathematics and writing in areas of provision and during teacher-led tasks, however, is lacking for most-able pupils. Not all adults have high enough expectations of what older pupils are capable of doing and achieving. Together with your leaders, you are correctly targeting these issues for improvement appropriately.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching and learning is embedded in key stage 3 to continue to improve pupils' progress in writing and mathematics, especially for most-able and disadvantaged pupils
- in key stage 2, all pupils, particularly disadvantaged and most-able pupils, are challenged in lessons to improve the quality of their writing
- systems effectively record, report and analyse behaviour more robustly so governors have a more accurate view to challenge leaders.

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

Yours sincerely

Ann Muxworthy
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, we discussed the work of the school with you, your deputy headteacher and other leaders. We also held a meeting with the leaders for English and mathematics. We observed, and spoke with, pupils during playtime and at other times during the day. We had conversations with representatives from the local authority and the consultant supporting teaching and learning. We met with three governors, including the chair of the governing body, who were able to provide me with additional information. We took into account school documentation, assessment information, policies and information posted on the school's website. We considered the 47 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View. Along with leaders, we visited classes to observe teaching and learning. We looked at pupils' work in English and mathematics to help evaluate the quality of teaching and learning over time. We considered information relating to safeguarding, attendance, behaviour and bullying.