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Mrs Louise Spellman
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Dear Mrs Spellman

Short inspection of Conyers School

Following my visit to the school on 10 May 2018 with Ofsted Inspectors Geoffrey Lumsdon and David Pridding, 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 December 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have taken action to improve outcomes where this was required. Due to your thorough and honest self-evaluation of the school's performance, you have a clear understanding of your current priorities. Neither you nor the governors are complacent about the school's achievements, and you are determined that improvements will continue to be made.

To achieve the improvements made since the previous inspection, you have focused very clearly on the professional development of teachers, so that the quality of teaching continues to rise. You have made it a priority to develop teachers' skills further through the use of video-based training and a programme of targeted 'micro-courses' which address the training needs of individual teachers. For example, you have established a pilot group to embed further teachers' strengths in planning lessons which challenge all pupils at the right level. While there is evidence that this is having a positive effect, you recognise that this continues to be an area for development.

As a consequence of the attention given to improving teaching, pupils' progress in English and mathematics has improved and is now in line with the national averages. An increased focus on the progress of disadvantaged pupils has led to improving outcomes for these pupils, including in English and mathematics, and standards are now in line with national averages. Progress in the English baccalaureate subjects of science, humanities and languages is now significantly

above the national averages. You acknowledge that, while there are signs of improvement for lower-prior-attaining pupils, there is still work to be done here.

Together with governors, you have a deeply held belief in the potential of your pupils, and you have high expectations of them. To support them in moving on to an appropriate next step at the end of Year 11 or Year 13, you have introduced an aspirational curriculum which provides them with the opportunities to achieve their potential. The key stage 4 curriculum, for example, is built on the 'cornerstones' of modern foreign languages, religious education and the sciences. This has contributed to an above-average proportion of pupils moving on to appropriate courses after Year 11.

Standards have also risen significantly in the sixth form. In 2017, progress was above the national average for A level, having been significantly below the national average in 2016. There is evidence in sixth-form lessons and in students' work that this improved high standard is being maintained.

We saw high standards of behaviour throughout the inspection, both in lessons and around the school. Inspectors saw no instances of poor behaviour. Pupils conducted themselves with politeness and respect. Relationships between pupils and staff are strong and help to create a purposeful, calm and orderly learning environment. Pupils told us, though, that behaviour in some lessons was not always as good, a view shared by some parents and carers. You acknowledge that there is more work to be done in managing the behaviour of a small group of pupils who, despite the strategies used so far, disrupt the learning of others. This is, rightly, one of your priorities.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Appropriate processes for the recruitment and vetting of staff are in place. Leaders make sure that all staff in the school are up to date with the necessary safeguarding training.

Leaders ensure that there are effective links with external agencies, such as the local authority children's services and the police. When there are causes for concern, leaders pick them up quickly and follow them up with the appropriate professionals. Child protection plans demonstrate the promptness of actions taken by leaders.

You have made sure that pupils are educated about the risks of extremism and radicalisation. The personal, social, health and economic programme provides pupils with information about how to keep themselves safe and free from harm. You have also ensured that pupils are educated about risks which are specific to your local area, such as the dangers of swimming in open water.

Leaders maintain appropriate communication with the alternative education provision used by the school, including daily attendance checks.

There was a very small number of comments in Ofsted's online questionnaires for pupils and staff regarding the open-access nature of the school site. You have actively addressed the situation and have taken steps to mitigate the risk. You told me, that you and governors have made it a priority to further secure the site, and that this is in hand.

To further safeguard pupils, you make sure that any pupil identified as being vulnerable is supported by a key worker. All of the pupils we spoke to, both in formal meetings and informally during social times and in lessons, told us that bullying is rare and that, when it happens, staff deal with the matter effectively. In Ofsted's online questionnaires, some pupils and parents were less confident about how well the school manages bullying when it happens. You are far from complacent, and acknowledge that you need to continue to maintain the work you already do to minimise and manage bullying.

Inspection findings

- As a result of your focus on making sure that teaching meets the needs of all pupils, there is evidence of appropriate challenge across a range of subjects and years. In a mixed-ability Year 10 English lesson about the play 'An Inspector Calls', for example, pupils had to choose a task depending on their target grades. The teacher further strengthened the high level of expectation and support by the skilful use of questions directed at lower-attaining pupils, including boys, to establish what they had understood and could do. In a Year 10 English upper set, the teacher's thoughtful use of questions generated a discussion of high quality regarding the historical, social and cultural context of 'An Inspector Calls', which challenged and enabled pupils to make links with other subjects, such as history.
- Inspectors saw evidence of teaching to meet the needs of all pupils in Year 7 French, where an effectively implemented seating plan supported low-prior-attaining pupils, boys and pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. This, and other approaches to meeting different needs, enabled pupils to write extended pieces, and to speak about the weather and holidays in accurate French. A similar rigour of expectation is evident in Year 10 history, where, over time, pupils are making good progress appropriate to their ability.
- There is variability, however, in the extent to which teachers challenge pupils at the right level. For example, in Year 8 geography, teachers do not set tasks for the most able pupils which sufficiently stretch them. Similarly, in Year 7 science, the most able pupils follow work which is too easy for them, while it is appropriate for low- and middle-attaining pupils. Leaders accept that there is still variability in the level of challenge.
- There is inconsistency in how well pupils understand what they need to do next to improve their work. In some subjects, such as Year 10 French, there is variability in how well pupils understand their areas for improvement. This is also the case in Year 10 mathematics. Some pupils can articulate that their main target is, for instance, how to factorise equations. Others, especially boys and

lower-attaining pupils, have a more generalised awareness, such as 'revise more'. Again, leaders acknowledge that there is still work to be done here.

- In the sixth form, decisive action since the dip in outcomes in 2016 has led to a secure improvement in the quality of teaching. Effective use of questions across a range of subjects helps to cement this in place. In Year 12 chemistry, for instance, teachers skilfully guided students towards deeper learning. In Year 12 sociology, on social class and gender, students displayed a high level of engagement and were clear about how to improve their work. Teaching in Year 13 government and politics challenged students to work at the appropriate level, as they prepared for an examination about the Supreme Court.
- To further secure improvements in the sixth form, you have focused on the quality of your system to track how well students are doing, and its impact on students' progress. As a result of this, through fortnightly meetings, leaders are able to monitor how well students are doing and, where necessary, take action to help them catch up. Consequently, standards in the sixth form continue to be above average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the needs of pupils of all abilities are met, including lower-attaining pupils and boys, through work that is appropriately challenging
- pupils are consistently clear on what they need to do to improve their work
- further action is taken to improve the behaviour of the small number of pupils who disrupt learning, and the ongoing culture of vigilance around bullying is maintained.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Stockton-on-Tees. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Steve Shaw

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders. I also met with governors, and spoke with the chair of the governing body on the telephone. An inspector met with a group of subject leaders. Members of the inspection team met with groups of pupils from key stages 3, 4 and 5 and also spoke informally with them around the school. Inspectors met with the leaders responsible for safeguarding, the sixth form, teaching and learning, pupil-premium funding, and

SEN and/or disabilities. We conducted joint visits to lessons with you, the leader of the sixth form and the senior leader responsible for teaching and learning. During these visits to lessons, inspectors looked at pupils' books and spoke with pupils about what they were learning and their progress. Inspectors also visited lessons without senior leaders. Inspectors looked in detail at pupils' books and folders. An inspector listened to pupils reading. Inspectors took into account results from Ofsted's online questionnaires: Parent View (118 responses), including the 101 free-text responses; the staff survey (71 responses); and the pupil survey (641 responses). We looked at a range of documentation, including: the school's self-evaluation, school improvement plans, safeguarding records, bullying logs and a local authority review of the school's management of bullying. Additionally, we looked at the school's internal questionnaires and surveys, pupil assessment and progress information, and other documents available on the school website.