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Mr Peter Blackburn
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Dear Mr Blackburn

Short inspection of John Ruskin School

Following my visit to the school on 3 July 2018 with Annette Patterson, 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 March 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

You were appointed as headteacher in September 2015, shortly after the last inspection. You and other leaders have built on the school's strengths and made significant progress in overcoming any weakness noted at that time. You lead a caring and successful school community, where pupils are happy, confident and safe. Your clear message to pupils is that they should be who they want to be. Pupils' individuality is prized, and this underpins a strong culture of diversity and inclusion, where pupils prosper.

Pupils' good conduct is a strength of the school. They enjoy positive relationships with one another and staff. Bullying is extremely rare and, on the few occasions when it occurs, pupils and parents say it is resolved swiftly and effectively. Pupils' behaviour in class is exemplary. Pupils understand how to learn well, and routinely do so. As a result, the progress that pupils make across a broad range of academic subjects is among the strongest nationally.

The school provides a very high standard of education and is highly regarded in the community. The overwhelming majority of respondents to Ofsted's survey, 'Parent

View', said that they would recommend the school to others. Parents and carers routinely expressed positive views of the impact that you and other staff have on pupils' academic achievement and pastoral well-being. One comment, which summed up the views of many, was: 'I cannot thank the staff enough. The school is excellent and an asset to the community.'

You and other senior leaders, including governors, know the school very well. You are not complacent, despite the significant improvements made in the quality of education provided since the last inspection. You use the leadership capacity demonstrated by the school's strengths, such as pupils' progress in English, to further improve the few aspects which do not currently meet these very high standards, such as pupils' progress in French.

Pupils' examination results in 2017 built upon the improvements made in recent years. Overall, pupils' progress was among the highest six percent of that achieved in schools nationally. Pupils' progress was especially high in English, geography, history and science. In fact, pupils' progress in English was in the highest one percent nationally. Disadvantaged pupils made far more progress than others nationally. Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities made almost a full GCSE grade more progress than others nationally. Pupils' outcomes in mathematics and French did not attain these heights, but mathematics outcomes were far higher than they had been previously. You described the steps that you and other leaders took to secure these results, and how these have been refined to secure similarly strong outcomes for current pupils across a range of subjects and further improve pupils' progress in French and mathematics. Inspectors' scrutiny of pupils' work demonstrated that these actions have been effective.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and other leaders ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Pupils, parents and staff say that pupils' safety is secure. Systems to recruit staff safely are established. Staff are routinely updated about safeguarding issues, including from external agencies. For example, recently, this has included training to protect pupils from child sexual exploitation. Staff take the time to know pupils well. Staff are vigilant and act swiftly when required. Inspectors checked referrals and found that they are followed up and recorded effectively. Safeguarding records are detailed and are well maintained.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe from potential dangers that can arise when using the internet. Leaders' checks to ensure the safety and well-being of pupils who are absent from school, including any who may have poor attendance, are effective. Inspectors found that leaders manage effectively the safety of the small number of pupils who attend alternative provision.

Inspection findings

- The first area that we considered was whether school leaders take effective action to secure the regular attendance of girls, disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities. Additionally, we investigated if girls' conduct is routinely positive. School leaders have taken effective actions. They are persistent, including when working with families to support the good attendance of their children. Girls, disadvantaged pupils, and those who have SEN and/or disabilities attend school regularly. There is now no difference between the attendance of these pupils and that of other pupils at the school. Support for pupils is personalised to meet individual needs and requirements. Some pupils require additional support to secure their physical and emotional well-being. Leaders take very seriously their responsibility to ensure that this provision is forthcoming, even if this results in a pupil's reduced attendance for a period of time. In these cases, leaders ensure that pupils are set appropriate work, are entered for and sit any examinations if they are in Year 11 and secure their next steps in education or training. Inspectors found that girls' behaviour is routinely positive. There are very few fixed-term exclusions for girls.
- Our second focus area was to investigate whether you and other leaders ensure that pupils have a secure understanding of fundamental British values. We found that this is the case. This aspect of pupils' learning has improved significantly since the last inspection. As a result, pupils are confident, responsible and outward-looking citizens. The school's curriculum has been thoroughly audited and, subsequently, redesigned to ensure that pupils are provided with meaningful opportunities to explore fundamental British values. Pupils apply their learning to their lives in school. They have a secure understanding of the world in which they live. They value diversity and are well prepared to engage in the democratic process.
- We investigated whether you and other leaders ensure that teachers consistently set work that matches pupils' requirements, and if teachers have high expectations of the work that pupils do. We considered whether pupils, particularly boys, make strong progress across the range of subjects that they study. Current pupils make very strong progress, across a wide range of areas. This is because teachers routinely use the information that they have about pupils to set work that challenges them. Teachers also use their strong subject knowledge to good effect, for example by enlivening pupils' learning experience through high-level questioning. You and other leaders expect pupils to present their work to a high standard; pupils do this. Pupils, including boys, demonstrate high levels of pride in their work. They value learning and know how to learn effectively. Pupils' attitudes to learning are a huge strength of the school.
- Current pupils are aware of the very high standards set by pupils who have taken their GCSE examination in recent years. As a result, there is a culture of academic success; these pupils wish to emulate their peers. In English, history, geography, science, music and technology subjects, current pupils' work demonstrates consistently strong progress of pupils, including boys. Pupils enjoy

and thrive in these lessons. In mathematics and French, teaching continues to strengthen over time, as does pupils' progress, although it does not match the levels of the other subjects.

- In mathematics, the curriculum now has a stronger focus on pupils applying skills that they have mastered to solve complex problems. Inspectors saw some effective examples of this, and high-end challenge, especially in key stage 4. In Year 7, some teachers do not routinely take enough account of the high level of mathematical expertise that pupils attain in primary school.
- The final area that we considered was whether you and other leaders have sustained the pupils' good progress in literacy, which was seen at the last inspection, and if you have secured more effective teaching of numeracy across the curriculum. Pupils' literacy has gone from strength to strength since the last inspection. Pupils are articulate, and this underpins their confidence as learners, and their academic success. Pupils are taught and encouraged to speak to a high standard regularly and across a range of subjects. They listen to their peers and respond with fluency and expression. You encourage pupils' reading effectively and they read widely and to a high standard. Pupils, including boys, write with enjoyment and confidence. Inspectors especially noted the focus on teaching pupils' accuracy in grammar, as well as spelling, which has further supported their consistently high levels of literacy.
- Leaders' strategic actions have extended and strengthened the opportunities provided by the work that teachers set to enhance pupils' numeracy. There are effective examples of where pupils' numeracy is being improved. In geography and science, for example, pupils regularly use mathematical skills that they have learned elsewhere to reinforce and develop their understanding and application in problem-solving. However, pupils' numeracy has not attained the very high standard consistently reached with pupils' literacy.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' outcomes continue to improve in mathematics and French, to match the very high standards in other subjects, particularly in English, geography and history.

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

Yours sincerely

Stephen Ruddy
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Meetings took place with you and your school leaders, members of the governing body, and a representative of the South Lakes Federation. Inspectors met with pupils throughout the inspection to gather their views on a variety of issues including safeguarding, well-being, fundamental British values, and teaching. We examined a range of the school's documentation such as self-evaluation, the improvement plan, assessment information, attendance and behaviour records and safeguarding information. We considered 46 responses to the Ofsted online parent questionnaire, Parent View, 27 written responses from parents to Ofsted's free-text facility and 20 responses to the Ofsted online staff questionnaire. We conducted learning walks, including some with senior leaders, across a range of subjects and year groups. We scrutinised the work in pupils' books by undertaking a work analysis together with school leaders.