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Mr Hugh Steele
Headteacher
The Dales School
Cowpen Road
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Dear Mr Steele

Short inspection of The Dales School

Following my visit to the school on 18 September 2018 with Christopher Campbell, 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 outstanding in October 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

You and your team have maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your leadership group are a very strong and effective team. You lead the school with drive, passion and commitment. Importantly, you have secured the strong support of all staff who share your deep commitment to ensure the best outcomes for every child at Dales School. As a result of the school's effective leadership and your colleagues' successful work, pupils develop confidence, communication skills and a love of learning. This was evident throughout the inspection.

Leaders and the whole school team continue to strive to develop the school. The school leaders have considered the teaching, assessment and tracking used with the pupils and note that refinement is needed for it to fully support all pupils in the school. They have started to develop a more focused teaching approach to promote the academic progress of the most able pupils in the school.

The school staff work effectively with the teaching alliance, promoting collaborative work with other schools and agencies. Staff describe feeling valued and appreciate the professional development offered by the school. They describe the positive impact on their work with the pupils as they further develop their own skills.

Inspectors identified one area for improvement at the last inspection. You have ensured that you have addressed this area. You have developed the website so that it is now a place where parents and carers can find comprehensive information about the school

and how their child is supported to develop their knowledge and skills.

Your self-evaluation gives a clear and accurate picture of the school's effectiveness. For example, you have developed a carefully planned creative curriculum which encompasses all aspects of learning. This curriculum is underpinned by the quality of teaching throughout the school.

You and your team place a high priority on developing the social skills, confidence and resilience of your pupils. This focus and the very strong positive relationships between your pupils and staff have developed a strong learning culture in the school.

Governors talked knowledgeably to inspectors about the curriculum and the way the school uses many approaches to support the development of every child. They describe their pride in working with the school and the progress pupils are making, for example in their academic, social and emotional development and in the development of their communication and interaction skills. Governors are asking pertinent questions of leaders. These questions and detailed responses help governors to be confident that they have a comprehensive understanding of the work of the school.

Parents were positive about the school's work. The parents who spoke to inspectors highlighted the hard work and dedication of the whole staff team and the significant support you give to pupils and their families.

The actions taken by you, staff and governors have placed the school in a strong position to continue to deliver excellent provision for your pupils. You have ensured that there are now very strong systems in place which are used well by staff, leading to timely adaptations to planning and school improvement to ensure a constant focus on excellent pupil outcomes.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are now fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. The leaders have developed the way the records are logged so they are more able to clearly demonstrate the actions taken by the school in relation to the pupils' welfare.

You have an excellent understanding of pupils' emotional needs and you work in close partnership with a range of professionals to make sure that pupils' needs are met. You and your staff are knowledgeable about the things that make children who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities vulnerable. This is because you provide regular high-quality training and updates for staff and you make sure that concerns about pupils are identified and reported in a timely way.

You work closely and effectively with other professionals and services to make sure that pupils who may be vulnerable are identified quickly and their families receive the timely and effective help and support they need.

Inspection findings

- I was keen to find out more about how you are planning the curriculum, and assessing and tracking the progress pupils are making and whether this gives you an accurate picture of how well they are doing. I found that the school has developed an effective assessment and tracking system to help teachers to plan lessons which will best match the needs of the majority of pupils. It is being used by staff in school to recognise the areas each pupil could further develop and then produce highly effective individual pupil learning plans. The leaders are using this information to drive school improvement initiatives which are helping to raise standards across school even further. Leaders' skills and understanding in the field of SEN and/or disabilities are shared with other schools as part of their work with the teaching schools' alliance. The school is developing the teaching and tracking for the academic aspects of learning for the most able pupils.
- I was also interested in how the school leaders have ensured that the quality of teaching seen at the last inspection has been maintained and continues to have an outstanding impact on achievement over time. It was clear that staff have a deep understanding of pupils' needs and there are strong, trusting relationships between staff and pupils. This, and the very clear focus on the needs of the individual child, have led to a very pupil-focused approach to teaching and learning. The lesson observations, work scrutiny, conversations with pupils, staff and parents, together with the data we analysed during the inspection, reflected the leaders' view that teaching and learning continue to have an outstanding impact on achievement over time.
- Lastly, I wanted to consider the effectiveness of leaders' actions around maintaining high levels of attendance throughout the school. Some pupils are reluctant to attend school. I was impressed by the leaders' commitment to supporting families in ensuring that all pupils attend school. There is a large support network in school which is highly effective in supporting families, so reducing absence from school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most able pupils make the academic progress they are capable of.

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

Yours sincerely

Catherine Garton
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you and your leaders, two representatives from the governing body, parents and pupils. Inspectors visited lessons with senior leaders, looked at the work in pupils' books and talked to them about their learning. Inspectors considered the results from Ofsted's online surveys. There were eight responses to the online parent survey. There were no responses to the staff survey. Inspectors spoke with various staff over the inspection day. Inspectors examined a range of documents, including information about attendance, safeguarding, the curriculum, the school's self-evaluation, the school's strategic plan, governorship, and pupils' progress.