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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mrs Christina Jones
Chief Executive Officer
River Tees Primary Academy
Sulby Avenue
Pallister Park
Middlesbrough
TS3 8RD

Dear Mrs Jones

Short inspection of River Tees Primary Academy

Following my visit to the school on 7 December 2018 with Louise Greatrex, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in January 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Recent turbulence in the leadership of the school has not had significant impact on pupils. You have ensured that the strong, shared leadership across the trust has enabled the continuous development and improvement of the primary school.

You and your regional standards lead (RSL) lead the school with a strong sense of purpose. You provide your pupils with opportunities to improve and develop their personal, social and emotional skills. This prepares them to successfully return to a mainstream school.

The introduction of strategies to support pupils with their social and emotional difficulties have had a positive impact. For example, pupils receive a healthy and filling breakfast on their arrival to school. This is a calm time where staff engage constructively with pupils. They encourage them to follow appropriate table manners by positive role-modelling. Following breakfast time, pupils move calmly and quietly to the gym where they become 'workout warriors'. Pupils take part confidently and are animated in their enthusiasm. A sports specialist guides them well. Staff encourage pupils to challenge themselves with a range of equipment and activities such as boxing, running and walking.

Your RSL is a real strength of the school. She has a clear and deep understanding

of the needs of your pupils. Her wealth of experience and expertise in this area of education has enabled her to establish strong systems and processes to develop and improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Staff are highly supportive and equally dedicated to your plans for improvement. They build extremely positive relationships with pupils. They understand them very well and, consequently, plan lessons to meet their needs and interests. Pupils make good progress, particularly in their emotional well-being. Staff take pride in their work. They enjoy the opportunities that are available to them. You and all your staff have high aspirations and expectations of your pupils. Staff strongly believe, 'We make a difference, we change lives.'

Pupils are happy to come to school and they feel safe and well cared for. Their high levels of attendance reflect this. Parents are equally supportive of the school. They enjoy the positive communications they receive. One parent explained that if she has 'any questions the school answers them and responds quickly'. Parents appreciate the wide range of opportunities their children now receive. For instance, taking part in swimming lessons that lead to recognised awards.

The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is excellent. Pupils are polite and welcoming to visitors. They work well together and will support each other in their work, if they can.

Positive steps have been taken to address the area for improvement from the last report. Your RSL is taking clear, constructive action to further achieve and develop the area for improvement.

The academy improvement board (AIB) is supportive and dedicated to the school and its pupils. It supports your drive and ambition to provide the very best for pupils who may have had difficulty in other settings. All members of the AIB spend time in school when pupils are there. This gives them a greater understanding of the day-to-day operation of the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You have a strong culture of safeguarding, which is clear throughout the school. Your safeguarding team is confident and very knowledgeable. They know each pupil individually and understand the difficulties that may arise. These are dealt with quickly and efficiently.

All relevant checks are made on staff. Staff are up to date with statutory safeguarding training. They understand their responsibilities towards pupils. Staff know the process to follow if they have a concern about a pupil, no matter how small.

Health and safety rules are routinely in place. Pupils know how, and why, they follow the rules, for example when using equipment when cooking. Pupils

understand how to be healthy and keep healthy. The school promotes physical activity and outdoor working.

Pupils' behaviour is good. They are kind, polite and respectful. Well trained and experienced staff deal with occasional occurrences of inappropriate behaviour professionally and skilfully. Pupils show remorse and appear genuinely sorry when an incident has occurred. They quickly turn their behaviour around and continue with their lessons. Other pupils do not lose any learning time, due to the rapid intervention by staff.

Inspection findings

- Attendance is positive and is increasing each year. Currently, it is close to the national average for mainstream primary schools. Staff diligently monitor those pupils who do not attend. This ensures they are safe and cared for when not at school. Where necessary, the school works closely with the local authority to ensure that all pupils attend school.
- Lessons are good quality, engaging and motivating. Teachers plan lessons that promote good progress for pupils with social and emotional difficulties. Staff plan lessons that are hands-on, and/or visual, at all times. However, teachers do not always challenge pupils enough in lessons, which inhibits their progress. Staff use transition time between lessons effectively to reinforce communication and social skills and knowledge. Pupils are industrious and respond well to staff prompts, interventions and directions.
- Workbooks are clear and tidy. Pupils are proud to show their work and can recall lessons and activities. Workbooks reflect the lack of challenge observed in lessons.
- The teaching of writing is developing but not yet fully effective. Training has been put in place for some staff. Currently, a small number of teachers do not provide sufficient and regular opportunities for pupils to write at length throughout the curriculum. As a result, not all pupils practise the skills that have been taught.
- The curriculum is thoughtfully planned to cover a full range of subjects. Leaders are continuing to develop the curriculum to meet the changing needs of pupils.
- Leaders have a realistic and positive picture of the school. However, their systems for measuring the progress of pupils are not yet accurate enough. Leaders have recently introduced new initiatives, but these need further development and consistency to ensure that pupils' progress is accurately monitored.
- School managers hold leaders stringently to account for the decisions they make. They provide a high level of challenge. They support leaders well in their high aspirations and ambitions for pupils. They have a determination that each pupil will benefit greatly from their time at the River Tees Primary Academy.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there are further opportunities to write at length throughout the curriculum
- there is further consistency in monitoring systems and processes that enable you to analyse data more effectively
- teachers provide further challenge in lessons to encourage stronger progress, build resilience and support the preparation for pupils' return to school.

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 Middlesbrough. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sara Roe
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, the inspectors discussed the work of the school with you, the regional standards lead and the lead for safeguarding. Inspectors also talked to six members of the AIB, including the chair. We examined information about pupils' progress and looked at pupils' workbooks carefully. The inspection team checked a range of documentation, including leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness and external evaluations of aspects of the school's work. We also considered the minutes of meetings of the AIB and the board of trustees. We considered the school's own survey for parents. The team visited all classes to observe teaching, learning and assessment. We were accompanied by you or the RSL. Both inspectors talked informally to pupils in lessons and around school.