

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Ms Jane Kennedy
Headteacher
Corbridge Middle School
Cow Lane
Corbridge
Northumberland
NE45 5HX

Dear Ms Kennedy

Short inspection of Corbridge Middle School

Following my visit to the school on 29 November 2018 with Jill Bowe, 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 April 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 and your team have secured high standards and significant improvements since the last inspection. You have worked with your senior team to strengthen leadership capacity and given middle leaders increasing responsibility for improvement strategies. Together, you have sustained high staff morale and a collective sense of purpose over a period of uncertainty while the local authority reviewed the three-tier system in the local area. You have built meaningful partnerships with other schools and the local authority to enhance the curriculum and provide external assurance on the quality of your work. You have developed supportive relationships with parents and carers, who are highly appreciative of the quality of education their children receive.

You and your team have a considered approach to school improvement. You identify improvement priorities and carry out research to seek the most effective ways of addressing these. Meaningful partnerships have been established with other schools to explore new initiatives and customise them to meet the needs of pupils at Corbridge Middle School. You have developed a strong culture of professional development where good practice is readily shared and the effectiveness of new

practices is carefully assessed by leaders and governors. Pupils have also participated in research to explore how additional challenge could be added to their learning and shared their findings with governors. Increasingly, the school's own expertise in school leadership and subject knowledge is being sought by other schools. You are currently trialling new assessment practices to provide pupils with effective feedback while managing some of the pressures that assessment can bring. This combination of ongoing professional development and thorough monitoring is facilitating marked improvement in a number of areas.

Your development of your team has been underpinned by effective systems to check pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. Your team has worked with colleagues in middle and high schools to develop a clear understanding of curriculum standards. You check pupils' progress at regular intervals and work with teachers to address any underachievement. Formal assessments are used to give additional checks on pupils' progress. Your senior team and subject leaders check the effects of their actions through observations of learning and scrutiny of pupils' work and progress. These robust systems are contributing to a rich curriculum and consistently effective teaching across the school.

You have responded with increasing purpose to the demands of the national curriculum. In 2018, more effective teaching enabled all pupils to make good progress at the end of key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics. Your team has successfully heightened challenge for the most able pupils, who made very good progress and reached greater depths of understanding that considerably exceeded that of their peers nationally. In addition, disadvantaged pupils made very strong progress. Their standards of attainment were better than pupils nationally. These outcomes reflect the intensive actions taken by leaders to enhance the quality of teaching. Even so, the progress and attendance of disadvantaged pupils is still not as good as their peers in school.

You and your team have shown a commitment to developing a wider curriculum that enables pupils to acquire deeper knowledge, skills and understanding across a wide range of subjects. The curriculum is regularly enhanced with visits to museums, galleries and places of historical interest to set meaningful contexts for learning. Your team work closely with their colleagues at local first and high schools to ensure that pupils experience well-planned progression in the curriculum as they move between different phases of their educational journey.

You and your team have done much to develop pupils' wider social awareness. You have worked with the NSPCC to deepen pupils' knowledge of their welfare and their rights. In addition, you have worked with groups such as Mermaids UK to develop pupils' understanding of diversity and sexual orientation. You have also worked with local authority consultants to raise pupils' awareness of hate crime and the dangers of all forms of radicalisation. Through this work, you are encouraging pupils to develop a respect for equalities and democratic processes, preparing them very well for life in modern Britain.

You and your team have also worked to enhance pupils' social and emotional

support. You have developed the roles of teaching assistants to provide specialist emotional support for issues such as bereavement and are becoming increasingly responsive to pupils' mental health. Pupils value their education and show productive attitudes to learning, although during the inspection pupils did not articulate their thoughts in lessons in a manner that reflected the depth of their written responses. Pupils value the care and support of their teachers and teaching assistants.

A significant proportion of parents took the time to write personal responses to Ofsted's free-text questionnaire. The overwhelming majority of parents praised leaders and teachers for their moral purpose and the broad and stimulating curriculum they offered. In addition, they were highly appreciative of the social and emotional support provided for their children and a culture that developed children's self-confidence and self-esteem. One parent reflected the views of many in writing: 'The pupils feel valued and listened to and have taken ownership of their learning thanks to the outstanding teaching and attention to the well-being of the children. All members of staff are approachable and supportive.'

Your governors have provided effective support and challenge. They are committed to the success of the school and maintain a consistent focus on performance. You provide governors with regular updates on pupils' progress. They have specific areas of responsibility and have the necessary expertise and commitment to hold leaders to account. They have worked with local authority partners to gain objective insight into performance management processes and to seek external validation of your work.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders make appropriate checks on the suitability of adults working at the school. School leaders and members of staff undergo regular training to enable them to carry out their safeguarding responsibilities. Governors carry out additional audits of safeguarding policies and practice. Leaders pursue concerns over pupils' welfare, although some written records do not fully reflect the actions they have taken.

Pupils spoken with say that they feel safe in school and their parents and carers agree. They say that bullying is rare, and that staff are effective in addressing any potential instances of bullying. Pupils were able to discuss the actions they could take to remain safe, for example the actions needed to stay safe online. Leaders have taken significant action to promote pupils' awareness of their safety and welfare through actions such as their partnerships with the NSPCC.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have secured extremely good progress for all pupils in writing at the end of key stage 2 in 2018. There is evidence that this is reflected across many other year groups, including at key stage 3. Senior leaders and subject leaders have

shared with pupils examples of the generic features associated with types of writing in different subjects. Pupils use this knowledge to effectively structure and sequence writing for a variety of audiences and purposes. Much writing is enriched by mature vocabulary and an accurate control of grammar and punctuation. Pupils have confidence writing at length. They write effectively in their English books and across a wider range of subjects. Pupils develop a strong sense of the generic conventions associated with different types of writing.

- In 2018, pupils made very good progress in mathematics at the end of key stage 2. This progress is reflected across other year groups. Subject leaders have effectively shared new schemes of learning and approaches to mathematics teaching. As a result, teachers have become more confident in implementing the mathematics curriculum. Pupils across year groups showed a confident understanding of mathematical operations. Teachers are adept at pitching work to meet the needs of pupils and to support their progress. In lessons and in books, there is evidence that pupils are responding successfully to increasingly complex problems.
- You and your team place considerable emphasis on the development of the wider curriculum. Your team ensure that pupils have access to a rich, broad and balanced curriculum at key stage 2 and 3. They benefit from specialist subject teaching across a wide range of subjects. In science, pupils carried out experiments to explore the properties of different types of fuels and their environmental impact. In French, pupils enthusiastically developed new vocabulary and their awareness of vocabulary. Strong practice was also evident in physical education, where teachers planned carefully to meet the needs of pupils. In art and music books, there was evidence that pupils developed their knowledge of creative processes and had regular opportunities to apply these and reflect upon their work. Your leaders have carried out considerable work to ensure that pupils are very well prepared for the next stages of their education.
- Your actions to enhance the curriculum are also reflected in your development of your own 'ambition' careers programme. As a middle school, you are mindful that preparation for future course choices and careers needs to begin early. As a result, you have introduced a thorough careers educational and guidance programme to develop pupils' awareness of their own interests and abilities and how to match these to possible careers. Pupils engage with a range of employers and professions to discover how their learning may be applied to future employment. This is an emerging strength of the school's curriculum.
- Your team ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils. You have reviewed support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and for pupils eligible for the pupil premium. These pupils make good progress. You have been particularly successful in improving support for pupils with SEND. Your team effectively diagnose pupils' needs and work closely with pupils and parents to put effective support in place. These actions are greatly valued by parents.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they build upon the good progress made by disadvantaged pupils so that remaining differences in their progress and attendance with their peers in school are further diminished
- they further develop opportunities for pupils to enhance their speaking and listening skills.

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

Malcolm Kirtley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

As part of the inspection, inspectors explored how leaders have secured improvements in pupils' writing at the end of key stage 2 and the extent to which these improvements are evident in other year groups. We also explored the effects of leaders' actions to accelerate pupils' progress in mathematics. We considered the quality of the wider curriculum and how well leaders have dealt with areas for improvement from the previous inspection.

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, your deputy headteacher and a wide range of middle leaders. We also spoke with six members of the governing body, including the chair and vice-chair. We held a meeting with a group of pupils and discussed pupils' learning with them in lessons. We held a telephone conversation with the school improvement partner from the local authority. We looked, with you and your deputy headteacher, at learning in lessons. We also looked at pupils' work in books. We examined school improvement priorities and discussed pupils' progress. We looked at documents, including the school's self-evaluation, behaviour and attendance records, and local authority monitoring reports. We examined safeguarding documents, including the single central record. We considered 126 responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire and 98 free-text responses from parents. We also took into account 74 responses to the pupil questionnaire and 30 responses to the staff questionnaire.