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Mr P Forster
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mr Forster

Short inspection of Atkinson House School

Following my visit to the school on 11 December 2018 with David Penny 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 December 2015

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Atkinson House is a welcoming school which is committed to developing the whole child. In this school, all pupils are valued and welcomed by staff.

You and your leadership team are supported by some strong, skilled teaching and non-teaching staff. Leaders and governors are highly committed to the school and to ensuring that all pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported to develop the skills they will need in their future lives.

Safeguarding is effective

The school is a safe environment. Pupils are encouraged to behave well in lessons and during unstructured times. Pupils' positive relationships with the adults in school lead to an atmosphere of trust, where pupils feel safe to develop their social and personal skills. The leadership team has ensured that the school's record of checks on the suitability of staff to work with young people is accurately maintained and compliant. Policies related to safeguarding, including the child protection policy, are up to date and meet the requirements of statutory guidance.

Staff receive appropriate training in all aspects of child protection, including the

'Prevent' duty to keep pupils safe from radicalisation. Staff know what to do if they have any concerns about the well-being of a pupil. Appropriate and prompt referrals are made to external agencies where necessary. Records of such referrals are accurately kept and monitored to ensure that follow-up actions are timely and effective.

Inspection findings

- Relationships between pupils and staff are very strong, staff know all pupils well. Pupils told me that adults help them with their work and also help them if they are worried or upset. Pupils and parents also told me that they are proud of the school.
- Governors are proud of the commitment shown by the staff. They have a clear vision for the future of the school and the developments they would like to support.
- In the sixth form, students have access to a range of programmes, which support them to develop the skills they will need in their future lives.
- The staff in school help the pupils to develop independent life skills through, for example, well-considered cookery sessions.
- Leaders are starting to see some success from their actions to improve the attendance of pupils who find attending school difficult. However, leaders do not record or evaluate the interventions and strategies used to see whether these are effective for all groups of pupils.
- The staff and pupils in school value the emphasis put on practical skills and programmes such as The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. The school has seen success in subject areas such as physical education (PE) and cookery. They have also increased the number of achievements in other areas.
- Teaching and learning in these more practical lessons has led to progress over time. This was evident through conversations with pupils, in books and in displays in classrooms.
- The teaching in other curriculum subjects was found to be inconsistent in quality and is not as focused on the pupils making more rapid progress.
- Leaders do not have a good enough understanding of the progress made by pupils in school. They are currently developing systems which will help to track pupils' progress. The leaders and teachers do not yet have a clear and consistent understanding of what is meant by the term 'good progress' when describing how pupils are moving forward in their academic work.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils receive good-quality teaching in all subject areas
- leaders can clearly demonstrate the impact of teaching and learning in all subjects

on the progress that pupils make

- staff have a clear understanding of what is meant by 'good progress'
- the school's system to assess and check pupils' progress is clear
- tracking information is used by teachers to inform planning for learning and to implement learning support to ensure that pupils make the best possible progress
- learning interventions support measures used across the school are evaluated for their effectiveness and their impact on pupils' progress
- strategies, which have recently been agreed by school leaders, are implemented and evaluated to ensure that attendance levels are improved

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

During the inspection, I met with you and members of the leadership team, the school improvement partner and with two governors. Inspectors met with pupils from across the year groups. I scrutinised a range of documents, including information on pupils' progress, and on safeguarding and development planning and the school's self-evaluation. My colleague and I visited classes and evaluated pupils' work. I took account of the views of the parents who came to meet inspectors and those who responded through Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.