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Mrs Christina Jones
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Dear Mrs Jones

Short inspection of River Tees High Academy

Following my visit to the school on 9 January 2019 with Linda Griffiths, 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 July 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Your leadership is characterised by determination and a sense of moral purpose. You are ably supported by your regional standards lead (RSL), and senior and middle leaders. Together, you have ensured that pupils at school are ready and willing to learn, and you are increasingly effective in supporting pupils' personal, social and emotional needs. You know your school very well. You know which areas of provision are particularly strong and those that require further focus. As a result, plans for improvement are sensible and linked targets are achievable. Your RSL has a keen eye for school improvement and her systems to check and to assure the quality of education on offer are fit for purpose.

The academy improvement board (AIB) is effective. Members of the board have a good understanding of the school and this helps them to ask you searching questions about your development plans. Members understand the context of your school and the particular pupils that you serve. They support you as well as challenge you to do even better. Members of the trust bring a strategic approach to the multi-academy trust. Both bodies help to keep the eyes of school leaders on the quality of provision for the pupils in your care.

Members of staff appreciate the focus that you place on their continual professional development. They say that teachers and other adults have an influential voice in

developing the quality of teaching at school. They talked animatedly about the 'research club' and 'teaching and learning parties' where members of staff can share ideas about teaching and develop their craft. Teachers and other adults who responded to the questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive about the quality of education on offer at school. Members of your staff are committed to the pupils in their care. Morale is high.

Teaching at school is increasingly effective. Relationships between members of staff and pupils are positive. In classrooms pupils focus well on their learning. Teachers present new material in an interesting and engaging way. Where learning is particularly strong, teachers use subject-specific language precisely and have high expectations of pupils. Here, teachers model the task in hand effectively and they question pupils well. This helps pupils to deepen their understanding of the subject. In mathematics, teachers spot the concepts that individual pupils have not fully grasped, and they intervene quickly to explain these in a different way. This is helping pupils to make strong progress in this subject.

You are not complacent and want the quality of education on offer to be even stronger. Sometimes teaching and assessment do not challenge the most able pupils well enough. Some teachers do not know the standards at which pupils who access the home and hospital teaching service are working precisely enough. As a result, some pupils are not crystal clear of what the next steps in their learning are.

School leaders have been focused on ensuring that the school continues to improve. Your improvement planning cites the correct priorities. You have a continued focus on developing the quality of teaching and learning. Rates of attendance are improving. Your focus on developing individual pupils' levels of literacy, oracy and raising the standards that pupils reach at school is bearing fruit.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have made sure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Procedures are sensible and are understood by members of staff. Policies used to keep pupils safe are effective, and staff training is up to date. Colleagues with responsibility for safeguarding are confident and knowledgeable. All relevant checks are made on staff.

What is striking is that at your school safeguarding is much more than a paperwork exercise. Members of staff know pupils as individuals and consider how to support them should any difficulties arise. Pupils behave well at school and treat each other with respect because they are continually 'nudged' in the right direction. The systems that you have in place help school leaders to identify any patterns of behaviour, 'hot spots', or likely pressure points. You are then able to support your pupils proactively. Teachers and other adults know pupils' individual behavioural needs and can shape their own dealings with them accordingly, to encourage them to behave well and to celebrate their successes. You shape the timetable for those pupils who experience a temporary crisis and ensure that their behaviour does not have a negative impact on others. This continual focus on positive behaviours has

led to your school being a calm and focused environment where pupils focus on their learning and the task in hand. As a direct result of these strategies, the number of fixed-term exclusions is decreasing quickly. This mirrors the decrease in the number of incidents where pupils are needed to be guided physically for their own safety and that of others. One pupil told me that 'the teachers here will always be there for you'. This mirrors the level of commitment that inspectors saw from members of staff.

Pupils are proud of their school and want to do well. They say that school is usually calm, and that bullying is rare and dealt with quickly. Members of the 'junior leadership team' have a direct input into school policies. For example, they helped develop the uniform policy. This has helped to ensure that pupils wear their school uniform with pride. Pupils are also taught how to stay healthy. One boy in a food technology lesson was very excited to explain how to make sausage bolognaise healthier, using meat substitute sausages and wholemeal rice.

Members of your staff are tenacious in ensuring that pupils are safe. When working with outside agencies, they do their best to make sure that any support that pupils require is offered in a timely manner. Records of meetings, together with notes of actions used to support pupils, are robust and precise. A similar tenacity can be seen in the way that the attendance team ensures that pupils come to school regularly. Rates of attendance continue to increase, and the proportion of pupils that are persistently absent continues to decrease.

Members of staff from your school make sure that pupils who access the home and hospital teaching service are safe and secure when being taught in hospital.

Inspection findings

- Leadership and governance of your school have seen major changes in recent years. As part of the inspection I wanted to find out if the quality of provision is strong despite these changes. Inspection evidence confirms that you have been effective in ensuring that the quality of teaching is strong. Pupils behave well and focus well on their learning. You are successful in identifying any areas for improvement and changing provision should this be needed.
- One of my areas of focus was the quality of careers education and the information, advice and guidance given to pupils. You and school leaders work with pupils to ensure that they have positive and sensible plans when they leave school after Year 11. Historically, the vast majority of pupils leave your school with plans in place for further education, employment and training. Your team also makes sure that pupils are followed up in order to check that they are settled in their new environment.
- Careers education is threaded through the curriculum. Visitors come to school to talk to pupils about the labour market and different careers. You offer pupils qualifications that help them to access courses that will interest them in the future. You make sure that each pupil has a career action plan with steps in place to help them meet their aspirations. Pupils told inspectors that they appreciate

these.

- I also considered the quality of the curriculum at school. You offer a range of qualifications for pupils. As part of your vision, you have decided to focus on academic studies where possible. You believe that this is helping to build a culture of hard work among pupils. Inspectors agree that pupils are committed to their studies and want to do their best in preparing for their life after school. Inspectors agree with your own assessment that most-able pupils sometimes do not make the progress of which they are capable. You have plans in place to address this.
- When new pupils come to your school your team prepares effectively for their arrival. There is a comprehensive induction process. You identify the standards at which any new pupil is working, and how best to support the pupil pastorally. You think carefully about how the pupil is integrated into the school environment and you make sure that they know your expectations.
- Your website gives parents helpful information about the standards that pupils reach by the time they leave in Year 11. I also wanted to hear about the rates of progress that pupils make when they are at your school. I wanted to verify that the systems you have in place to check this are strong enough. You have a good understanding of the progress that pupils are making. The way in which targets for pupils' progress are set shows that you have high expectations for the pupils in your care. Generally, teachers translate these targets into sensible 'next steps' for pupils in classrooms. However, this is not carried out as effectively for pupils who access the home and hospital teaching service and so some of these pupils are unsure of their 'next steps'. Nonetheless, you and other leaders use progress information effectively when planning for further improvements at school. The 'progress meetings' that your RSL leads, where you attempt to spot and deal with any wobbles that individual pupils are experiencing in their learning, are having a positive impact on pupils' progress.
- Another area of focus for the inspection was the extent to which you and your staff support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Individual teachers generally plan well to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. However, together we saw that the paperwork that is generated to help teachers know the exact needs of individual pupils is weak. Information about the strategies that teachers can use to help pupils is sometimes missing or too generic. Opportunities are sometimes missed to support pupils with SEND as a result.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- most-able pupils make stronger progress and reach higher standards
- plans in place for pupils with SEND are comprehensive and that they help teachers to know how to support these pupils to make good progress
- teachers know the standards at which pupils who access the home and hospital teaching service are working, and that all pupils' next steps are clear.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Middlesbrough. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Michael Wardle
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you as executive headteacher, your RSL and members of the senior leadership team. I also met a group of your middle leaders, including a colleague responsible for developing careers education at school. I spoke with two members of the AIB. One is the chair of the AIB, and the other is a trustee for the multi-academy trust. You and the RSL joined inspectors as we observed teaching and learning across the school. Inspectors also observed learning and spoke to pupils who access the home and hospital teaching service. A visit was made to the 'learning centre', which is used to support pupils as they re-integrate into school.

An inspector met with colleagues responsible for safeguarding, behaviour and attendance. We also reviewed a wide variety of documents, including those relating to safeguarding and policies on the school's website. You presented information detailing pupils' progress and attainment, the school's self-evaluation document and the school development plan. We met with a group of pupils, some of whom are members of the 'junior leadership team', and spoke to other pupils informally in classrooms. We reviewed pupils' work from different year groups and different classes. Inspectors also considered the 28 responses to the staff questionnaire and the two responses to the pupil questionnaire.