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Mrs Susannah Webb
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Webb

Short inspection of Gosforth Central Middle School

Following my visit to the school on 16 January 2019 with Julie McGrane, 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 June 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Under your skilful leadership, the school has flourished and improved its performance. Weaker aspects of the school's work have been addressed successfully. For example, the work you and your staff have done to improve pupils' writing and to revitalise the teaching of mathematics has proved successful. This is reflected in the quality of work in the books of pupils currently in the school. In English, pupils now develop their writing skills through the close study of stimulating and challenging texts and by learning the writer's craft directly from visiting authors. Teachers provide pupils with frequent feedback on their writing. Pupils use this feedback well and routinely review and redraft their work. This process is successfully helping most pupils to improve the quality of their writing. Last year, over 90% of pupils in Year 6 attained the expected standard in writing, which was well above the national average. In mathematics, teachers are ensuring that pupils get plenty of opportunities to explain their thinking and apply their knowledge to challenging problems. In line with school policy, mathematics teachers now give some time each lesson to checking whether pupils can recall mathematical knowledge covered in recent lessons and in the more distant past. This approach is helping pupils to know more and remember more. The proportion of pupils who attained the expected standard in last year's key stage 2 national curriculum mathematics test was also well above the national average.

The high attainment of pupils at the end of key stage 2 is because of the importance you have placed on the training and professional development of your

staff. The previous inspection report asked you to ensure that more teaching was of an outstanding quality. In response, you have successfully fostered a climate of professional learning and research across the school. For example, teachers use video recording of their lessons to reflect on their own practice. Coaching and professional dialogue are now embedded in the school. Furthermore, your decision to create an extended leadership team has devolved more responsibility across the staff, further strengthening the culture of professional learning. Our observations and your own checks on the quality of teaching confirm these approaches have had a positive effect, over time, on the standard of teaching across the school.

You are currently reflecting on the suitability of your curriculum and are considering how it might better meet the needs of your pupils. It is currently broad and balanced in each year group, with no narrowing evident when pupils approach national curriculum tests in Year 6. All national curriculum subjects are taught. Careful timetabling is ensuring that teaching resources are thoughtfully deployed to meet the needs of different ability groups. There is a good balance of time given to academic study and pupils' personal development. A working group is currently developing a more considered rationale for the design of the curriculum going forward. Governors are being kept well informed of developments. We found you and your staff to be excited by the challenges of curriculum design. However, some aspects need further thought. For example, not enough consideration has been given yet to how your curriculum can best meet the needs of pupils with different starting points. We found, for example, that there is no coherent policy or practice for ensuring that the most able pupils are challenged consistently. Similarly, you have identified that you need to be more consistent in the quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Pupils certainly value their education at Gosforth Central Middle School. Levels of attendance are high and have improved steadily over recent years. Every effort is made to remove barriers that might prevent a small minority of pupils from wanting to come to school. Pupils are also punctual to lessons and come ready to learn. Behaviour in class and around the school at social times is excellent. Pupils are extremely polite and respectful of one another and the staff. Over time, very few pupils have been excluded for poor behaviour and no pupils have been permanently excluded. You have well-considered arrangements in place at social times to support pupils who feel more anxious or vulnerable.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Since the last inspection, you have actively fostered a team approach to safeguarding and child protection. The safeguarding team is well led and managed by an experienced and knowledgeable senior leader. Together, you ensure that staff training is up to date and that your policies and practices are in line with the most recent government guidance.

You have a highly effective system in place for record-keeping, which the staff use to report any 'niggles' they have about the children in their care. You monitor this

information carefully and work collegiately to weigh the evidence before deciding on the best course of action. You follow up quickly and pursue concerns through to a conclusion.

Your curriculum has also been designed to ensure that pupils are taught about risk so that they can make sensible decisions for themselves. For example, I observed a personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) awareness lesson in which pupils learned about the different types of drugs and their effect on the body. The PSHE curriculum covers a broad range of risks, including online safety.

You have good systems in place for gathering the views of pupils. We found you give considerable weight to their views and use them to shape your policies and curriculum offer. Pupils told us they feel safe in school and know what to do if they have a concern.

Inspection findings

- Typically, pupils enter the school having attained above average standards at key stage 1. Once in the middle school, the work in pupils' books indicates that most pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. However, not all groups make the same progress. Your own assessment information shows that disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND make slightly less progress than others in the school. Consequently, narrowing gaps in progress of different groups of pupils features strongly in this year's school improvement plan and in teachers' individual performance management targets. Overall, pupils' attainment at the end of key stage 2 was well above the national average last year. Your disadvantaged pupils attained standards in line with those of other pupils nationally. Your tracking system has some weaknesses, however. It does not, yet, provide secure evidence about the progress pupils make from entering the school in Year 5 to leaving in Year 8. This makes it difficult for governors to fully understand the value the school adds to pupils' learning in the time they spend in the school.
- The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. Teachers are very reflective practitioners who readily engage in professional learning. They are open to scrutiny and welcome the feedback they receive from their colleagues. Most teachers plan lessons thoughtfully and are increasingly drawing upon research to inform their lesson design. On this inspection, we focused particularly on whether teachers challenged the most able pupils appropriately. We found some variability here, with some teachers tailoring their lessons well, but others less precise and sometimes missing opportunities to get the best out of the most able pupils. You agreed with these findings and accepted that teachers need clearer guidance about how to consistently pitch their challenge for the most able pupils correctly.
- A strength of the school is the quality of pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare. You and your staff place considerable importance on the development of the whole child. You are inclusive in approach and ensure that your curriculum and extra-curricular offer supports the development of pupils' character effectively. Teachers help pupils to become more caring, resilient and

aspirational. A good example of this is the role played by the 'storm team' at social times. These older pupils play an important role in volunteering to organise play activities and in looking after younger pupils at social times.

- The governors provide effective oversight of the school. They have appropriate experience and insight about the school's overall performance. They understand its broad strengths and weaknesses and play an effective role in setting out a vision and direction of travel. The governing body committees provide a sound level of scrutiny but need to guard against taking information at face value. For example, governors were not clear if the additional funding the school receives to help Year 7 pupils catch up in English and mathematics is being used effectively. The governors make regular visits to learn about the quality of teaching and, where necessary, challenge leaders to make improvements.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- further thought goes into the implementation of the curriculum, so that it fully meets the needs of pupils with different starting points
- disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND make as much progress as other pupils across their four years in the school
- teachers have guidance and training on how to more consistently stretch and extend the most able pupils
- there are effective systems in place to report to governors on the progress of pupils and groups of pupils in reading, writing and mathematics from entry in Year 5 to exit in Year 8.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, inspectors met with you, the deputy headteacher and other senior leaders, members of the extended leadership team and some subject leaders. Inspectors also met with the chair of the governing body and four other governors and the school's achievement partner. An inspector also held discussions with a group of pupils. Inspectors visited lessons in key stage 2 and key stage 3 to look at the quality of teaching and learning. During lesson visits, inspectors scrutinised some pupils' workbooks and talked to pupils about their

learning and progress. Inspectors also scrutinised a range of pupils' books across a broad range of subjects. Inspectors looked at the 66 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, the 33 responses to the staff survey and the 71 responses to the pupil survey. Inspectors also scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, policies, assessment information and monitoring records. Other documents available on the school website were also reviewed.

The inspection focused particularly on the progress being made by pupils currently in the school, especially the most able, the quality and breadth of the curriculum, and pupils' behaviour and attendance. Inspectors also looked at the work of governors and the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.