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Mrs Christina Jones
Chief Executive Officer
River Tees Middle Academy
Sulby Avenue
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Middlesbrough
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Dear Mrs Jones

Short inspection of River Tees Middle Academy

Following my visit to the school on 16 January 2019 with Diane Reynard, 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 May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

You have a deep understanding of your pupils and their needs. You and your leadership team have clearly identified the priorities for action that will have the most positive effect on the outcomes for pupils. Your staff support you wholeheartedly in your ambitions for the school and your pupils. A positive sense of nurture prevails throughout the building. Staff are well trained and sensitive to the needs of pupils.

You have built an effective leadership structure. Leaders at all levels are determined and motivated to provide the best possible opportunities for pupils. You encourage staff to take part in research-based initiatives and strategies which improve the outcomes for pupils. Staff appreciate the development opportunities that are available to them. They are proud to work at the school and enjoy the improvements that have been made.

Pupils enjoy coming to the school. Many have had considerable difficulties in their previous schools, including non-attendance and behavioural concerns. Most now have very positive attendance, and one pupil said: 'We need to think about how we behave so that we can do our best.' Pupils recognise that staff support them well and they understand the difference the school makes to their lives. Pupils feel very safe and well looked after at the school. One pupil stated: 'It's more like a family,'

with which other pupils firmly agreed.

Teaching across all curriculum subjects is of a good standard. Teachers use a variety of methods, activities and styles to engage, motivate and interest pupils. Staff use resources well to support learning. Support staff encourage pupils to think for themselves through the use of skilful questioning and reassurance.

The academy improvement board (AIB) is knowledgeable and dedicated to the school. All members attend school while pupils are there. Due to this they have a good understanding about the day-to-day activities. They hold you and your leaders to account for your decisions and actions. They hold you in high esteem and appreciate the work you do for the school and your pupils. The AIB has high expectations of staff and is very ambitious for pupils.

You have addressed the area for improvement identified in the last inspection. Teaching is now of a standard where pupils learn well. There has been a great deal of work carried out to ensure that the pupils receive a good depth of knowledge and understand how to use the skills they have learned.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff and members of the AIB receive high-quality and relevant training. Safeguarding leaders are very knowledgeable, and there is a clear sense of genuine care for the pupils. The safeguarding team is persistent in its pursuit of the correct support for pupils and their parents and carers.

Staff are confident in raising concerns to safeguarding leaders. They know the school's procedures very well. Staff understand how to spot the signs of neglect and abuse. Support is in place for staff who deal with pupils with difficult emotional issues. The secondment of a child and adolescent mental health worker to the school has had a positive effect. Staff are now more able to support pupils with mental health difficulties to positive conclusions. Leaders recognise the benefits for pupils of working with a wide range of professional external partners.

Pupils learn how to be safe and stay safe through many aspects of the curriculum, particularly personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. They understand the importance of keeping healthy and enjoy many regular outdoor activities. You invite external visitors to the school to speak to pupils. This extends their knowledge about health, relationships, cyber bullying and anti-social behaviour.

Inspection findings

- Teachers plan and teach exciting, interesting and motivating lessons. Most use assessment and monitoring information accurately to personalise lessons, although this is not always consistent across the curriculum. This results in some of the most able pupils not receiving a high enough level of stretch and challenge

in their work. Teachers present their lessons well and use resources effectively to enhance learning. Accurately targeted support ensures that all pupils are making progress in English and mathematics. A lack of opportunities for pupils to write at length, both in English lessons and in other areas of the curriculum, limits their progress in writing.

- Pupils have clear personal targets. They receive good-quality advice and support to enable them to progress well towards their targets.
- Pupils enjoy their lessons and say that the interesting content and the way they are taught help them a great deal with their attendance and behaviour. Staff encourage pupils to use the skills they have learned in a variety of ways throughout the curriculum. Most pupils are enthusiastic learners and are well prepared for their lessons.
- The quality of teaching at the different sites of the school is consistently strong. Leaders keep a sharp eye on what is happening and visit regularly to quality assure the standards of education and pastoral care.
- Pupils' workbooks are well presented and uniform throughout the school and across all curriculum subjects. Pupils are proud of their workbooks and encourage visitors to see the quality of their work and the range of activities they do.
- PSHE lessons address many important current issues. They stimulate discussion and broader conversations which result in deeper understanding by pupils. Teachers are not afraid to focus on sensitive subjects, for example the understanding of different religions and mental health, including depression and bipolar disorder. They often introduce community or local area misconceptions to give pupils a deeper and wider understanding.
- The key stage 3 leader is effective and very ambitious for pupils. He is clear on the methods he is using to develop and improve outcomes for pupils. He has a strong sense of purpose to ensure that the pupils can be the best version of themselves.
- Attendance is positive and is increasing. Most pupils have increased their attendance since moving from their previous schools. Staff work very hard to increase the attendance of those that find it difficult to go to school. Effective communication measures are firmly in place that allow staff to make sure these pupils are safe and looked after.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes around the school and in classrooms are good. Staff deal with the very occasional difficulty sensitively, and little learning time is lost as a result. Pupils report that behaviour around the school is positive. They are well supported by staff to moderate their behaviour. Relationships between staff and pupils are very strong. Pupils are prepared to listen carefully and they follow instructions well. Pupils now have a greater understanding about how to behave in the community. For example, on a recent trip away from the school, a group of pupils witnessed an elderly lady falling and her dog running away. Without hesitation, they went to her assistance, helping her up and retrieving her dog.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there are increased opportunities for pupils to write at length throughout the curriculum
- teachers use assessment more accurately to provide further stretch and challenge throughout the curriculum, particularly for the most able pupils.

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

Inspectors met with you and other leaders, including members of the AIB, to evaluate the strengths and areas you are further developing across the school. We also discussed improvements since the previous inspection. Together with members of the leadership team, we visited all classes in the school, including those on other sites. We reviewed work in pupils' books across a range of year groups and subjects. We spoke to pupils, both formally and informally, about their learning and experiences of school. We read and scrutinised a wide range of school documentation, including attendance information and documents relating to behaviour, exclusions, safeguarding and child protection. We also considered the seven free-text responses from parents, eight responses to the pupils' survey and 22 responses to the staff survey.