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Mr Dean Jones
Principal
Firth Park Academy
Fircroft Avenue
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Dear Mr Jones

Short inspection of Firth Park Academy

Following my visit to the school on 6 February 2019 with Lynne Selkirk and Aejaz Haler, Ofsted Inspectors, 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. As a result of the continuous growth in pupil numbers since 2015, you and your governors have strengthened the leadership team. A vice principal and a senior vice principal were internally promoted in September 2018 and a new assistant principal was appointed in January 2019 to oversee behaviour. A middle leader was promoted to the position of assistant principal in September 2017, with responsibility for teaching and learning. Following recent changes in the governance model provided by the Academies Enterprise Trust, a new chair of governors with considerable experience in school improvement leads the local governing body. As a result, there is strong capacity in the school's leadership to bring about further improvement and achieve the standard of provision that you aspire to.

The school leadership team is focused, passionate, and committed to continuous school improvement. The systems and processes you have put in place with the support from the trust allow you and your senior leaders to correctly and accurately identify areas that need improvement and to support and improve performance in those areas. You have ensured that leadership at all levels is focused on the progress of pupils and as a result, pupils continue to make good progress.

School leaders have successfully tackled the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. At the last inspection, you were asked to improve the quality of teaching so that all pupils, but particularly those in Years 7 and 8, make

more rapid progress. You acted swiftly, and with your leaders developed a new feedback and assessment policy. You reviewed the monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning and you ensured that staff received appropriate training, including on strategies for improving the challenge teachers provide to all pupils. Leaders, working closely with the trust, introduced a revised and more challenging curriculum for pupils in key stage 3 and refined the school's assessment procedures. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning is improving. The progress of all pupils in mathematics at key stage 3 is also improving.

At the last inspection the school was also asked to ensure that teachers apply the school's behaviour systems consistently. Leaders introduced a new behaviour system and they ensure that there is regular monitoring of the implementation of this system by all staff. As a result, instances of low-level disruption in lessons are continuously decreasing. In most lessons, the environment is calm and pupils' attitudes to learning are positive.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your leadership team take the safety of pupils in your care very seriously and have ensured that there is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Your senior leader with responsibility for safeguarding leads her team effectively. Senior leaders know the pupils very well and have made certain that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of good quality.

The school has effective referral procedures and leaders take actions swiftly and monitor impact closely. The school's relationship and communication with external agencies is strong. This means that you share information effectively and in a timely way. Your safeguarding leader has ensured that staff receive appropriate training in child protection, including the dangers of radicalisation, drug trafficking, youth gangs and child sexual exploitation. Staff discuss vulnerable pupils regularly and receive frequent safeguarding updates. As a result, staff know the signs to look out for and what to do if they have any concerns. You and your team ensure that you carry out appropriate checks on the suitability of all staff who work with pupils.

Pupils say that bullying sometimes does happen, but, when it does, teachers and leaders tackle it quickly. The vast majority of pupils also report that they feel safe, know who to go to if they have any concerns and are confident that staff will deal effectively with any problems. Inspection evidence confirms this.

Inspection findings

- Leaders' thorough monitoring systems show that the quality of teaching overall is good and improving. You have identified staff in each department to focus on supporting disadvantaged pupils. Senior leaders carry out frequent monitoring of the teaching and learning strategies used in lessons and the impact on the quality of teaching and the progress of pupils. As a result, most teachers provide appropriate challenge for pupils and use questioning effectively to probe understanding and support their progress. During joint visits to classrooms,

inspectors and school leaders agreed that there are some inconsistencies in the quality of teachers' questioning, in the quality of responses from pupils and in the level of challenge provided to the most able pupils. From the joint scrutiny of pupils' work, we could see that there is also variation in what teachers expect from pupils and that presentation of pupils' work is inconsistent. You and your team have correctly identified teachers and subjects that need further support. Inspection evidence indicates that some successful strategies are not yet fully embedded. More work is needed here to further improve consistency in the quality of teaching and learning.

- Leaders use aspirational targets and monitor pupils' progress extensively through a comprehensive assessment system. Leaders ensure that assessments are checked rigorously by external partners. As a result, school leaders are confident that any strategies for supporting pupils are accurate and targeted.
- Pupils join the school with prior attainment significantly below national averages in the key subjects of English, mathematics, and science. Leaders are taking effective actions to mitigate the impact of many pupils joining the school at different times of the year, across all year groups. As a result, the progress pupils made from their starting points, over the last three years, has been in line with other pupils nationally. Pupils in Year 10 and Year 11, including disadvantaged pupils, continue to make good progress across a wide range of subjects. School assessment information and inspectors' scrutiny of pupils' work confirms this. Even when pupils' attainment is below the national average, pupils have made strong progress from their significantly below average starting points.
- Pupils receive good-quality careers information, advice and guidance. There is a carefully designed careers programme, led by an experienced careers adviser. It includes themed assemblies; alumni speakers; work experience opportunities for all pupils in Year 10; and trips to universities, post-16 providers and employers. The curriculum is continuously reviewed so that pupils are well prepared for their next steps in education, employment or training. Consequently, the number of last year's Year 11 pupils not in education, employment or training is below the national average. The proportion of pupils in the current Year 11 who are entered for the English Baccalaureate is much higher than last year.
- You and your leaders analyse extensively the attendance of all groups of pupils and know your pupils well. You have enhanced the school's attendance team through the strengthening of the leadership in this area. In 2016/17 the attendance of all pupils was in line with the national average and persistent absence was below the national average. In 2017/18 the school experienced a decline in attendance and an increase in persistent absence. You and your leaders acted quickly and refined and improved school procedures further. As a result, the attendance and persistent absence of current pupils in school are improving. More work is needed in this area to further improve the attendance, persistent absence and punctuality of all groups of pupils.
- Since the last inspection, the rates of fixed-term exclusions have been significantly above the national average. In 2017, you and your leaders implemented a new behaviour policy and raised expectations further. As a result, the number of fixed-term exclusions increased. You have improved and extended

the support you provide for pupils who struggle to meet the high expectations of behaviour. Leaders have further modified the new behaviour system, to adapt to the needs of pupils in your school. Staff are applying the behaviour policy more consistently, including the use of rewards. As a result, the number of behaviour incidents for the current cohorts of pupils is decreasing significantly and the rate of fixed-term exclusions is declining.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the attendance, persistent absence and punctuality of all pupils continue to improve
- rates of fixed-term exclusions continue to decrease further and at a faster pace
- leaders continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that:
 - teachers consistently plan activities to meet the needs of all pupils, including the most able pupils
 - teachers' expectations of what pupils are capable of are consistently high, across all subjects.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the Academies Enterprise Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Sheffield. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Dimitris Spiliotis
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you and your senior leaders, middle leaders and governors, including the chair. Meetings were also held with a range of staff and a system leader from the trust. A telephone conversation was held with the national director of secondary schools of the trust. The inspectors met with a range of pupils from Year 7 to Year 11 to glean their views of the school. Inspectors conducted tours of the school and visited a range of lessons, some with senior leaders, looking at pupils' work and observing their learning. The inspectors, alongside senior leaders, also conducted a scrutiny of pupils' work in a range of subjects.

The inspection team scrutinised and evaluated a range of documents relating to safeguarding, behaviour, attendance and school improvement. Inspectors took

account of the 36 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including the 10 extended responses from parents. They also took account of the 29 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.