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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Sam Hirst
Principal
West Park Academy
Alderman Leach Drive
Darlington
County Durham
DL2 2GF

Dear Mrs Hirst

Short inspection of West Park Academy

Following my visit to the school on 19 March 2019, 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 March 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your high expectations of what pupils can achieve are shared fully by leaders, governors, staff, pupils, parents and carers. You lead a capable team of senior leaders with an accurate view of each aspect of school performance. Together, you make regular checks to ensure that pupils benefit from the improvements that you make. As a result, this vibrant, successful school continues to move forwards.

You have developed your middle leaders well through a wide range of training and support. As a result, they drive improvements in their specific areas based on accurate evaluation and purposeful action. Ultimately, this has strengthened the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Staff appreciate this support from leaders. One staff member commented that, 'Staff are involved in the decision-making process, agreeing on outcomes and means of getting there.'

Pupils are polite, articulate and immensely proud of their school. Pupils say that they enjoy their lessons because they are 'fun', 'interesting' and 'help you to keep getting better'. They appreciate the wide range of extra-curricular activities, for example charity fun days, educational visits and guitar or trumpet tuition. There is a high participation in the full programme of after-school clubs offered, for example football, street dance, cookery and multi-sports. This contributes effectively to pupils' social and creative development.

Almost all of the parents and carers who shared their views were extremely positive

about the school. Parents describe the school as 'highly inclusive' and 'forward thinking', with 'an ethos which is palpable'. One parent wrote: 'Teaching promotes self-inquisition so that the children learn not only the curriculum, but more importantly, they learn about themselves and how they fit into society.'

You and your staff have resolved the areas identified for improvement at the last inspection. The highly skilled mathematics leader is part of a mathematics 'hub' and she provides support to several schools in her role as a primary specialist in mathematics. This high level of expertise enables her to implement a high-quality policy, increase staff subject knowledge, raise expectations and regularly review pupils' work in books. As a result, pupils achieve well in mathematics and present their work accurately.

Pupils' work in books shows that feedback from teachers supports pupils to extend or deepen their learning. Pupils say that teachers and teaching assistants help them to understand why they may have misconceptions and how to correct them.

The effective governing body and trustees of the school have an accurate view of strengths and areas for improvement. They carry out regular skills audits to ensure that they utilise their skills and experiences to support and challenge leaders.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You have established a strong culture of safeguarding within your school, with a clear remit that safeguarding is the responsibility of everyone. You and your designated deputy safeguarding leads follow clear and accountable safeguarding practices. Staff and governors have regular and relevant training so that they have a clear understanding of what do to if they have any safeguarding concerns.

The office manager is meticulous in ensuring that the required checks are made on all staff, governors and volunteers who work in the school. Appropriate checks are made on staff before they start employment. You have established a detailed system to record concerns and incidents relating to all areas of safeguarding which all staff follow effectively.

You ensure that the curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to learn how to keep themselves safe in the wider community. Pupils can say what they have learned about fire safety, road safety and how to cycle safely on roads. Pupils say that they feel safe and they have an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including when they are online.

Inspection findings

- Over time, the progress pupils make in reading across key stage 2 has declined. In 2018, this was lower than their progress rates in writing and mathematics. The leader of English introduced a new approach to the teaching of reading to make sure that inference and deduction skills in reading are taught specifically. Work in

books shows that current pupils are developing their skills to retrieve information and answer questions about complex texts. Most pupils currently in the school are now making good progress in reading, but there has been insufficient time for this to have made a positive difference to pupils' outcomes at the end of key stage 2.

- In 2018, disadvantaged pupils also made weaker progress in reading than in writing and mathematics. You wasted no time in responding to this. You used pupil premium funding to ensure that teachers provide effective targeted support to help this group of pupils be successful readers. Evidence in books and assessment information show that current disadvantaged pupils across the school are making strong progress in developing reading skills.
- Teachers and teaching assistants provide effective support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has arranged training for all staff, on various aspects, to support the pupils in school with significant needs. Current pupils with SEND make strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics, particularly across key stage 2.
- In 2018, the progress made by most-able pupils, including most-able disadvantaged pupils, across key stage 1 was stronger in writing and mathematics than in reading. To tackle this issue, you made changes to the learning environment in Year 1 and increased the challenge within the reading curriculum across key stage 1. Our examination of pupils' work and your school records confirms that progress in reading is improving and more pupils are working at the greater depth of learning for their age in Year 1 and Year 2 than in previous years. However, there has been insufficient time for this to have made a positive difference to pupils' outcomes at the end of key stage 1.
- Pupils' overall attendance in 2018 was above the national average and continues to improve. You have sharpened your leadership systems to check on the attendance of pupils, to make sure that they attend school as regularly as possible. The proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school has risen over recent years because of pupils and families who are dealing with challenging circumstances. For other groups of pupils, persistent absentee rates are improving, for example for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND. Overall, the persistent absentee rate remains below the national average. Leaders work closely with external agencies to provide support plans for these pupils and their families.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers continue to develop pupils' inference and deduction skills in reading
- pupils make stronger progress rates in reading to enable the pupils expected to attain the higher standard at key stage 1 and key stage 2 to do so
- pupils who require it are provided with higher levels of challenge in class to extend their learning, particularly in reading.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the regional school's commissioner and the director of children's services for Darlington. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Alison Aitchison
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection I met with you, your deputy principal, senior and middle leaders, governors and the officer manager. I met, formally, with a group of pupils to discuss their attitudes to learning and their views of the school. I listened to a group of pupils from Years 1 and 2 read. Together with you and your deputy principal, I made visits to classrooms to observe pupils learning around the school. I looked at pupils' workbooks across a range of ages and abilities, as well as discussing the information from the school's assessment system. I discussed the work of the school, including the procedures and processes in place for safeguarding. I also viewed documentation, including your school improvement plan, school self-evaluation document and governor meeting minutes. I took account of 99 responses to Parent View, including parents' free-text responses. I considered 48 views from the Ofsted staff survey and 33 responses to the Ofsted online pupil survey.