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Mr Rob Cole
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Cole

Short inspection of Whitecliffe Academy

Following my visit to the school on 11 July 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in November 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since you were appointed in September 2017, you have developed clear values and a strong sense of community. Pupils talk about the school motto, 'to be the best that we can be in all that we do', with great pride.

You work well with the executive headteacher from Teesside Learning Trust and together you have high expectations and aspirations for what pupils can achieve. You have developed your senior and middle leaders through relevant and high-quality professional development. Together, you know the school well and have accurate self-evaluation which informs your school development priorities. All staff who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire said that leaders use professional development to encourage, challenge and support teachers' improvement. As a result, you have strengthened the quality of teaching and improved outcomes for pupils over time.

Pupils told me that they love attending Whitecliffe Academy. They talked enthusiastically about the different leadership responsibilities that the school offers them. These include, for example, play leaders, school councillors, playground buddies, reading buddies and eco-warriors. Pupils are aspirational when talking about their future careers, whether these might be working as a teacher, a police officer, an artist, a vet or a marine biologist.

The vast majority of parents and carers who shared their views during the inspection were highly complimentary about the school. They appreciate the strong progress that their children make and the approachability of staff if parents have a concern.

You, and other leaders before you, have responded positively to the areas for improvement identified at the inspection of your predecessor school. Pupils of all abilities now have high expectations of what they can achieve. This is because of the aspirational culture of the school and the challenging work that teachers set for all pupils. You ensure that strong practice is shared not only between staff in your school but through effective partnerships with other schools within the multi-academy trust. Staff ensure that pupils have opportunities to practise the skills that they learn so that they can apply those skills in subsequent lessons.

The proportion of boys attaining the expected and higher standards in writing at the end of key stage 2 was above the national average in 2018. The proportion of boys attaining or exceeding the expected standard in writing by the end of Reception and key stage 1 in 2018 was not as strong as their attainment in reading and mathematics. Therefore, this was an area to explore during this inspection.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. As the designated safeguarding leader, you impress upon your staff the importance of taking all safeguarding matters seriously. As a result, there is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. You, and your deputy designated safeguarding leader, have established effective systems for staff to report and record any safeguarding concerns. Case studies considered during the inspection show that high-quality support is provided for pupils who are vulnerable or at risk. Your actions to support these pupils and their families are timely and appropriate.

Pupils say that they feel safe and are taught how to keep themselves safe inside and outside of the school, including when they are online. Pupils say that everyone takes a strong stance against bullying and therefore bullying is not a problem. Parents agree, stating that the school staff do everything they can to keep their children safe. The systems that you have established with the attendance officer demonstrate your determination to ensure that pupils maximise their learning opportunities.

Inspection findings

- You and leaders at all levels have created a positive learning environment which encourages staff and pupils to be aspirational. The local governing body, known as the academy council, has responsibility for the strategic development of the school. They hold meetings regularly which are well attended. Governors have established their roles and special interests linked to the findings of regular skills audits. Through a wide range of bespoke training, governors have ensured that they have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for development.

However, there have been fewer opportunities for the members of the academy council to access training to develop their wider, more strategic, governance skills or knowledge.

- In 2018, the proportion of boys attaining and exceeding the expected standards was below the national average in reading and writing at the end of Reception and in writing at the end of key stage 1. The proportion of boys attaining the higher standard in reading at the end of key stage 2 was also below the national average. I wanted to find out if teachers were providing sufficient challenge to all pupils, but particularly for boys in English. Together with you, I looked at pupils' work in English lessons and in books. We agreed that the proportion of pupils currently working within the expected and greater depths of learning in English has increased. There are no notable differences in attainment between boys and girls currently in any of the key stages. Pupils use ambitious vocabulary in their writing and understand the meaning of words when they read. This is because developing vocabulary has been a focus in writing this academic year. The quality of handwriting and presentation is not consistently strong across the school. Although leaders have focused on improving these areas in writing, and mathematics, this is a recently introduced focus and is not yet fully embedded.
- In 2017 and 2018, pupils made exceptional progress across all key stages in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion of boys, disadvantaged pupils or pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) who reached the higher standards, however, in reading, writing and mathematics across the school was below average. I wanted to consider the progress that current pupils make over time. Leaders monitor the progress of all pupil groups closely, in reading, writing and mathematics. Current pupils across the school are making strong progress from their individual starting points, particularly in reading and writing. The proportion of pupils working within the greater depths of learning in mathematics across the school is more variable and not as secure as in reading and writing.
- I also looked at how teachers are challenging all pupils, including those who are most able, in lessons. The quality of teaching and learning in lessons and work in pupils' books show that teachers have high expectations of what all groups of pupils can achieve. Pupils rise to these high expectations and relish the challenging tasks. Pupils who are eligible for additional funding receive targeted and timely intervention in lessons and through access to specific resources. This helps them to access challenging tasks in mathematics. However, although pupils' fluency and problem-solving skills are developing well, work in books shows that pupils make careless errors and often do not check their calculations or answers for accuracy. Pupils are taught how to reason mathematically but sometimes do not use precise mathematical terminology in their written responses to explain their reasoning. As a result, this is preventing some pupils from exceeding the expected standards in mathematics across the school.
- In 2017 and 2018, the proportions of pupils who were absent, and persistently absent, were much higher than the national average. You and your attendance leader have worked hard to ensure that pupils attend school every day. You have implemented effective systems to monitor absences. Your incentives and rewards to encourage pupils to attend regularly have been successful. For example, pupils

are enthusiastic to collect attendance rewards which can then be exchanged for whole-class treats and visits. Pupils also recognise the importance of attending school regularly. The proportion of pupils who have been absent or persistently absent this academic year is much reduced and is now closer to last year's national average for all pupil groups. The number of pupils receiving exclusions has also significantly reduced this year compared to the same period last year.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils, particularly the most able, check their work and record their mathematical reasoning more thoroughly
- teachers continue to embed their high expectations about pupils' presentation of work in writing and mathematics
- the academy council members receive increased opportunities for strategic governor training and development.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the board of trustees, the interim chief executive officer of Teesside Learning Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Redcar and Cleveland. 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 and other leaders. I also met with the executive headteacher, the interim chief executive officer and chair of the trustees from the Teesside Learning Trust. I spoke with a group of governors from your academy council, including the chair and vice-chairs. A group of pupils shared their views with me about the school. I talked with other pupils as I met them in lessons and at breaktimes. I looked at work in pupils' books with you and your English leader. I considered documents, including those linked to keeping pupils safe, the school's self-evaluation document and the school's improvement plan. I gathered the views of parents as they brought their children to school. I took account of the views of parents at the beginning of the school day. I also considered 11 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, including free-text responses. I took into account six responses to Ofsted's staff survey.