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Mrs Joy Finn
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Finn

Short inspection of Meadowdale Academy

Following my visit to the school on 9 May 2017 with Ofsted Inspector Lee Elliott, 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 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 strengthened leadership by building a strong team of senior and middle leaders who share your commitment to achieving the highest possible outcomes. These leaders monitor pupils' progress and share good practice to drive continual improvement. You have nurtured a distinctive team ethos, resulting in a shared sense of purpose and ambition. As a result of strong leadership, regular monitoring and effective teaching, pupils achieve high standards and make extremely strong progress.

You and your team have continued to improve the quality of teaching. In English, pupils are set challenging tasks and act upon feedback to improve the quality of their work. Increasing challenge in mathematics is enabling more pupils to work at higher levels, as is evident in Year 8, although this is still not consistently embedded. Stronger subject expertise is bringing appropriately pitched work in science, although this rigour is not matched in history and geography.

You and your teachers have responded diligently to the increased demands of the new national curriculum. Teachers plan carefully to address these heightened expectations. As a result, at key stage 2 in 2016, pupils made outstanding progress in reading and writing and made strong progress in mathematics. In addition, the proportions of pupils who met and exceeded expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics were well above those seen nationally. The diligence and sustained ambition of teachers are reflected in the strong progress that pupils

continue to make.

Your commitment to the professional development of your team has a clear impact upon improvement. Teachers across the school work with local partners to moderate standards, strengthen expertise and improve provision for pupils. Teachers are keen to take on leadership opportunities and share good practice with colleagues. You have encouraged staff to innovate and take managed risks, while maintaining a focus upon the impact of such initiatives on pupils' progress and well-being. Self-evaluation is accurate and refreshingly honest, as you share clearly those areas where you feel further improvement is needed to sustain strong academic outcomes and high standards of care and support.

Your leaders have clear systems in place to check the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Strengths are shared and areas for improvement are identified. This has led to consistently good standards of teaching across the school, although variance in the quality of work in some subjects is not consistently addressed. Pupils' progress is tracked and reviewed every term and summaries of progress are shared with teachers and governors. Performance management procedures are robust and reviewed at regular intervals against pupils' progress. You encourage your leaders to carry out their roles with a healthy degree of trust and with the knowledge that clear systems of accountability remain. It is a reflection of the strong leadership capacity you have built across the school that acting leaders provided both stability and continued development during a period of absence for senior leaders in the autumn term.

While the school has clear academic strengths, you and your team are equally committed to the social and emotional development of pupils. The broad and balanced curriculum is enriched by wider experiences and learning opportunities. Pupils value the extensive opportunities to participate in a range of sporting activities, including netball, running and wave boarding. In addition, they participate in a diverse range of extra-curricular activities on offer each night of the week, including film, radio and art clubs, while every year group has access to a residential trip. You have developed initiatives to explore issues of bullying and the threats pupils can face online, as well as providing a range of activities to support pupils' social and emotional resilience on issues including bereavement. Pupils appreciate the wider experiences on offer which add to their self-esteem and confidence.

Governors are committed to the success of the school. They combine ongoing reviews of the school's performance with wider consideration of long-term developments, such as the challenges resulting from changes to school phase structures across the local authority. Governors are increasingly visible in checking the impact of additional funding, such as the use of pupil premium funding. The chair of the governing body has regular catch-up sessions with the headteacher to maintain a close focus on pupils' progress and any emerging issues. Appropriate committee structures are in place to monitor standards and finance. Governors explore progress information with increasing scrutiny but they do not always have the expertise to independently challenge the headteacher in order to propel the school to further excellence.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your team maintain a strong focus on pupils' welfare. Staff receive up-to-date training in a wide range of key safeguarding issues. In discussion and in responses to questionnaires, the vast majority of pupils expressed that they felt safe and happy at the school. You have reviewed safeguarding procedures and brought in additional measures to address welfare concerns. Concerns over pupils' welfare are effectively addressed and the school has effective links with external partners. Pupils spoken with were able to discuss the actions they could take to remain safe, for example the actions needed to stay safe online. Appropriate checks are made on the suitability of adults working at the school, although some aspects of documentation are not checked tightly enough by leaders and governors.

Inspection findings

- You and your team have instilled a culture of high expectation and built rigour into teaching, learning and assessment that has enabled pupils to respond well to more challenging curriculum demands. In the 2016 national tests at key stage 2, pupils achieved outstanding outcomes, with pupils achieving levels of attainment and progress that were well above those seen nationally.
- The impact of teaching is consistently good across the curriculum and teachers demonstrate convincing subject expertise in the majority of subjects. They question pupils skilfully to deepen their understanding. Teachers engender effective learning behaviours in pupils, who are comfortable when asked to develop their written responses or reconsider a response to a question.
- Teachers promote a love of reading and pupils respond well to the opportunities to read widely and in a range of genres. Pupils across year groups demonstrate effective reading skills and read aloud with clarity and expression. In some cases, their understanding of vocabulary is not as well developed, but teachers use questioning effectively to probe understanding and develop pupils' understanding of unfamiliar words. Strategies to develop pupils' comprehension skills are highly effective.
- Pupils make extremely good progress in writing and demonstrate accomplished standards of writing in their books over time. They have the ability to write effectively in a range of genres and write well at length. Teachers enable pupils to develop an extremely good understanding of grammatical features, which they use to effect in their own writing and to deepen their analysis of texts.
- Pupils make good progress in mathematics. Work in books revealed that pupils have regular opportunities to develop their arithmetic methods through wide curriculum coverage and frequent practice. Although progress is good, the most able pupils do not have regular opportunities to explore more demanding mathematics problems and consequently deepen their understanding and reasoning.
- While pupils make good and sometimes outstanding progress in English and mathematics, this is not as consistently reflected in other subjects. Progress in

history and particularly geography is not as strong, as curriculum coverage is narrower and pupils are not set tasks that challenge them sufficiently, particularly the most able. Science teaching provides opportunities for pupils to experiment, work scientifically and cover appropriate content, although the depth of work does not match that seen in English and mathematics.

- Other aspects of the wider curriculum capture pupils' enthusiasm and develop their wider interests and personal development. Pupils developed meaningful links with residents from a local care home through a poetry project. Last year's 'Road to Rio' project stimulated broader cultural insight and physical exercise. Pupils value the sense of responsibility they develop as sports leaders and members of the school parliament. Pupils achieve outstanding outcomes in their European Computer Driving Licence course, with 86% achieving a distinction in 2016. Pupils are prepared well for their future studies and employment through initiatives such as the school's own careers conference.
- The vast majority of pupils are well behaved and conduct themselves in an orderly manner around the site. Relationships are good and this promotes positive attitudes to learning. Rates of attendance are typically in line with those seen nationally, although the improvements this year in the attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has been offset by a fall in the attendance of disadvantaged pupils.
- Teachers closely track the progress of disadvantaged pupils, who made better progress than other pupils nationally in all subjects at key stage 2 in 2016. Their progress in reading and writing was particularly strong. Current progress information shows that disadvantaged pupils are continuing to make good progress.
- Leaders have a close understanding of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Effective systems are in place to diagnose pupils' needs and teachers and teaching assistants have developed sound systems to continually monitor their progress. Although outcomes for the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, are good, these pupils do not make as significantly positive progress as other groups because work does not consistently provide sufficient challenge to meet their needs.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- accelerate the progress of the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, by providing them with increasing opportunities to work at greater depth
- strengthen the curriculum and increase levels of challenge so that pupils' progress in foundation subjects, such as history and geography, matches that in core subjects
- further develop governors' expertise to increase their independent ability to hold leaders to account for pupils' progress and to ensure that key documentation is accurate and up to date.

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

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Kirtley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you and members of your leadership team. We held a meeting with a group of pupils and talked to pupils less formally in lessons. We met three members of the governing body, including the chair. We also talked to the school improvement adviser. We undertook observations of learning with senior leaders and looked at pupils' work in books and folders. We examined the school improvement plan as well as other documents, including the school's self-evaluation, assessment information, behaviour and attendance information, and documents relating to pupil tracking. We examined safeguarding documents, including the single central record of security and suitability checks on staff. We took into account 32 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 20 free-text responses from parents and carers. We also took into account 38 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire and 42 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.