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Mrs Catherine Brooker
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Brooker

Short inspection of Stokesley School

Following my visit to the school on 1 February 2018 with Alexandra Hook and Joanne Suddes, 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 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. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

You and your head of school provide highly effective leadership. Self-evaluation is incisive and precise and, because of this, the school improvement plan focuses on the areas of most significance. You both lead by example and are highly capable professionals. It is evident that you and other leaders show resolute determination and your actions are having a positive impact on key areas that need to improve further. You, your head of school, other leaders and staff work well together for a common, moral purpose, and that is to ensure that pupils in the main school, and students in the sixth form, get the highest quality of education and experiences in preparation for their future.

Governors know the school well and provide effective challenge and support to you and other leaders. Governors are well aware of the areas that are strong and continue to focus on sustaining improvements over time, but they are also aware of the areas that need further attention. Their candid and sincere approach serves you and the school well.

You, your head of school and other leaders have implemented effective systems to monitor different aspects of the school's work, for example the quality of teaching across the school and in the sixth form. While the systems in place are generating necessary information, not all leaders are making consistent and precise use of this. Therefore, some leaders' evaluation of the impact of improvement strategies is not incisive enough. This is particularly the case in relation to the school's pupil premium strategy and information about pupils' attendance and persistent absence.

You and other staff have high expectations of all pupils. The caring and compassionate ethos permeates the school, promoting a culture of mutual respect between staff and pupils. Pupils are highly appreciative of all that staff do for them and they are unequivocally confident that staff will go the 'extra mile' for them to ensure that they achieve their very best. Behaviour around the school site and in lessons is exemplary. Movement is calm, orderly and courteous. Pupils are proud of their school. They wear their uniforms with pride and look very smart in their respective house colours.

Students in the sixth form are equally appreciative of all the work that staff do for them. They are confident that staff will help them and support them should the need arise. They are proud of being a part of Stokesley's sixth-form provision and to be considered as role models to younger pupils in the main school. Students also said how much they value and contribute to the respectful and tolerant environment.

The vast majority of parents and carers who completed Ofsted's Parent View online questionnaire show confidence in the school. They are confident that their children are safe and happy at the school, and would recommend the school to another parent.

You have successfully tackled the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. It is evident that staff routinely use information about pupils to provide work that meets their varying needs and abilities. As a result, the challenge for pupils is consistently high. Staff make effective use of questioning to encourage pupils to develop and extend their understanding and knowledge. Staff also, frequently, check pupils' learning so that they can move on in a timely way or, indeed, so that staff can intervene quickly to tackle any emerging misconceptions. As a consequence, these concerted efforts have ensured that the quality of teaching across the school is of a consistently high standard, and because of this, learning opportunities are maximised. Over time, pupils of all abilities make strong and sustained progress in a wide range of subjects. Furthermore, leaders are not complacent and therefore have rightly prioritised efforts to focus on improving disadvantaged pupils' progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are carefully maintained. The school's single central record and recruitment processes are thorough. Regular training for staff ensures that they know what to do if they

have a concern about a child. The designated safeguarding lead and governors who monitor the school's safeguarding work are knowledgeable. They have a clear understanding about the importance of this aspect of the school's work.

The school's calm and courteous atmosphere contributes well to pupils' personal development and welfare. Pupils who spoke to inspectors said they felt safe and were confident that adults will help them if needed. Incidents of poor behaviour and bullying are rare but if they do occur, pupils know that issues are dealt with immediately and appropriately. School records confirm this.

Inspection findings

- One area we discussed, at length, was around the progress disadvantaged pupils make. From these discussions, it was clear that you remain committed to diminishing the difference between the progress of disadvantaged and other pupils. Discussions with various leaders would indicate that there are different actions in place to ensure that aspirations are high for disadvantaged pupils, for example bespoke careers advice and guidance.
- Leaders are also now beginning to review more specific barriers to learning and provide tailored support to some pupils. An example of a successful long-term strategy is the 'literacy plus' programme, which is developing some pupils' confidence and basic literacy skills. As a result of this programme, some pupils' reading ages have significantly improved over time.
- After discussing how you spend the funds you receive for disadvantaged pupils, it is evident that you are reflective and do make some changes to the systems and strategies in place. It must be noted that you, your head of school, governors and staff are resolute in enabling disadvantaged pupils to achieve their very best. However, it is not clear to what extent these systems and strategies are evaluated and refined into short-term steps. As a result, leaders and teachers are not wholly clear on the impact these are having on current disadvantaged pupils' outcomes.
- Another area we discussed was about the progress and attainment of pupils in English. Due to the unforeseen changes in leadership in the English department, outcomes have not been as strong as other subjects, such as mathematics, modern foreign languages and science. You have acted swiftly to resolve these issues and because of your commitment to supporting the English department, staff confidence is developing and their creativity is being actively encouraged. The current head of department, alongside the lead practitioner, is providing stability to the team.
- Teaching observed in English shows clear improvements and is now a developing strength of the school. Teachers' strong subject knowledge instils confidence in pupils and, as a result, they readily participate in discussions and share ideas using key subject terminology. Teachers use questioning skilfully to develop and extend pupils' understanding and knowledge. Work in pupils' books and current pupil assessment information demonstrate that pupils' outcomes are improving rapidly. You and your head of school are justifiably proud of this team and their

hard work and efforts.

- An area of focus during the inspection was the quality of sixth-form provision, student outcomes, and how well prepared students are for their next steps. Sixth-form leadership is an evident strength of the school. The vice principal, responsible for the 16 to 19 study programmes, has a strong knowledge of the provision and knows the students very well indeed. She genuinely cares for them and their needs. This is reciprocal as students speak highly and fondly of her work and the efforts of the wider sixth-form team. Advice and guidance afforded to students is of high quality, and, in some instances, it is specially designed to meet individual students' needs and aspirations.
- Quality assurance systems in place to monitor and support underperforming students and subject areas are effective. These systems capture students' progress and the quality of their work. This ensures that they have every opportunity to succeed and achieve their targets, or beyond.
- Students in the sixth form are positive, caring and respectful. They are proud to be part of the school community and they are proud to be ambassadors for Stokesley's sixth-form provision.
- Inspectors also looked at the actions leaders are taking to improve attendance and reduce persistent absenteeism of pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils. Rates of absence and persistent absenteeism show some improvement to date for this academic year. Leaders, including heads of house, are beginning to identify barriers that affect pupils' attendance and are using this information to take appropriate actions. For example, the head of school is determined to work more closely with families to overcome barriers. Leaders acknowledge there is still further strategic and systematic work needed to ensure that the attendance of all pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, continues to improve.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- consistent monitoring and sharp evaluation of strategies aimed at supporting disadvantaged pupils lead to improved outcomes for this group
- further work is targeted to improve the attendance and reduce persistent absenteeism of pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged.

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 North Yorkshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Darren Stewart
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Meetings took place with you, your head of school and members of your senior and middle leadership teams. Meetings also took place with a group of governors and trustees, groups of pupils in the main school and a group of students from the sixth form. Inspectors examined the school's self-evaluation document, the school improvement plan and records relating to pupils' current assessment information, teaching and learning, behaviour and attendance. The single central record was checked, and relevant safeguarding procedures were reviewed. Learning walks to observe learning in each key stage were conducted, some with school leaders. Inspectors considered 10 responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey and 66 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey. They received and considered 137 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents.