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16 May 2016

Mr Liam Murtagh
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Murtagh

Short inspection of Dr Thomlinson Church of England Middle School

Following my visit to the school on 26 April 2016 with Alexandra Hook, Ofsted Inspector, 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 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Highly effective senior leaders, middle leaders and teachers ensure that the majority of pupils, whatever their starting points, make good progress and those who need to catch up do so quickly. Effective support from teachers and teaching assistants is used to quickly tackle any emerging gaps in learning. Over the last three years outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics have steadily improved at the end of key stage 2.

The school has recently reviewed the curriculum and developed an effective system for collecting and analysing pupils' assessment information in partnership with the middle and high schools of the Three Rivers Learning Trust. Staff skilfully employ this new curriculum and assessment system to engage pupils in their learning and regularly review how well they are doing.

Pupils at the school are eager to learn and want to do well. The atmosphere in the school during lessons is calm and ordered and pupils settle quickly to work and enjoy their lessons and learning. They are polite and friendly and their

behaviour in lessons is outstanding. Pupils are happy at school and say that although there is some name-calling, bullying is rare, and that any issues are resolved quickly by adults.

The governing body knows the school well and is ambitious for the school and its pupils. Governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and the areas that could be improved further. Parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, are overwhelmingly supportive of the work of the school and the way it is led. They are confident that their children are happy, safe and well taught.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors, have ensured that the school's safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and effective. Records are detailed and of high quality and arrangements to keep pupils safe are robust. All staff receive regular and appropriate training so they know how to keep pupils safe. There is a calm and purposeful working environment throughout the school which has a positive impact on pupils' conduct and their understanding and tolerance of others. The pupils we met, and those who responded to the online questionnaire, confirmed the good quality of care and support they receive, and are confident that they can trust staff to deal with any concerns they may have.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have taken effective action to improve pupils' skills in reading, writing and mathematics across all key stages. The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection and is now of a high standard throughout the school. Lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work confirm that most teachers have high expectations and plan lessons and activities which engage, challenge and enthuse pupils of all abilities in their learning. Teaching assistants provide high-quality support in class and make a strong contribution to learning because they are clear about what the teacher wants them to do and why.
- The school curriculum has been carefully redesigned to give a broad and challenging education. Pupils say they enjoy their work and they value the support they receive from adults. They like having time in lessons to review and respond to teachers' comments on completed tasks in order to raise the quality of their work. Relationships between teachers and pupils are of high quality and pupils throughout the school display very positive attitudes to their work. Levels of attendance for pupils continue to improve and are well above the national averages for middle and secondary schools. The number of fixed-term exclusions is low.
- The school has clear and effective systems for checking on pupils' progress in order to identify any individuals or groups who need extra help.

- The achievement gap for disadvantaged pupils is small throughout the school due to the timely and effective support these pupils receive.
- Pupils make good progress across a range of subjects and by the end of Year 6 the standards pupils reach in reading, writing and mathematics are well above the national average. By the end of Year 8 pupils' achievement in English, mathematics, science and most other areas of the curriculum means they are well prepared to make the most of the next stage of their education.
- Governors know the school well and have positive relationships with senior leaders. The school website is very well presented and contains all the information required to ensure that parents are well informed if they wish to find out about the school online.
- The school's self-evaluation is over-generous in some areas and reports from the local authority school improvement partner lack challenge. However, development plans identify the correct priorities and the school is in an excellent position to continue to improve.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the recent trend of improvement in pupils' achievement is maintained by ensuring that all teachers plan and deliver challenging lessons that are closely matched to pupils' needs and abilities.

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

Yours sincerely

David Brown
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection we held meetings with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, four members of the governing body including the chair and vice-chair, and groups of pupils. We visited classrooms, in some cases with a senior leader, to observe teaching and learning, to talk with pupils and to consider the progress made by pupils in their books. We observed behaviour in and around the school and examined incident logs and records of attendance. We looked closely at the school's website, published policies and self-evaluation, and checked safeguarding records. We considered 35 responses to the online pupil questionnaire, 10 responses to the online staff questionnaire and 78 responses to the online parent questionnaire (Parent View).