

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Michelle Richards
Executive Headteacher
Furrowfield School
Whitehill Drive
Felling
Gateshead
Tyne and Wear
NE10 9RZ

Dear Mrs Richards

Short inspection of Furrowfield School

Following my visit to the school on 7 February 2017 with Ofsted Inspector Fiona Dixon, 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 April 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 arrived in Furrowfield initially in a temporary capacity, following significant turbulence in leadership and governance after that inspection. You rapidly 'took the bull by the horns', leading by example, to ensure that the school recovered, to build morale and to continue the school's journey to outstanding. You have successfully energised staff, governors and pupils in your ambitious vision. Together with the complementary skills of the leadership team, you have ensured that Furrowfield is a welcoming, safe, calm and purposeful school community. It is grounded in the high expectations you have to improve pupils' life chances, to prepare them well for life after school and as citizens in modern Britain today.

You have tackled the areas identified as needing improvement at the previous inspection effectively. For example, pupils' progress in English is hastening, not least due to the significant range of planned opportunities pupils have to develop their reading and literacy skills throughout the day. Special reading sessions for pupils who struggled with reading in their previous schools help pupils catch up quickly to where they should be and to give them the confidence to 'have a go' at more complex texts. The improved curriculum and range of enrichment opportunities within and beyond the school day is enticing pupils back into learning successfully. While you acknowledge absence rates are still higher than average, they have reduced significantly as a result of actions taken. This includes support to pupils and

families in times of great need and the strident action taken when support does not result in a reduction in rates.

Your resolute focus on improving the quality of teaching is having the desired effect on its quality and pupils' learning. Teaching is good and pupils usually make good progress from their often well below average starting points into school. English, mathematics and science books showcase the effort pupils put into their learning and the good progress they are making. Pupils' achievements in art are strong. You and your senior team's regular checks on teaching have recently identified that, occasionally, the most able are not always stretched enough.

The development of pupils' behavioural and personal qualities, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural dimensions is a real strength. Teachers, teaching assistants and the key worker for each pupil have a good understanding of pupils' needs. This is as a result of the very good relationships they develop with pupils and the meticulous records they keep on pupils' behavioural, social and emotional needs. Staff work together sensitively and successfully, to support and manage the complex behaviours of pupils. They are also becoming increasingly adept at helping pupils to take responsibility for their own behaviour. Consequently, the number of pupils subject to fixed-period exclusions is reducing well, as is the proportion who require physical intervention when serious incidents flare up.

Governors have worked with you to secure recovery from the turbulent times and drive the school forward successfully. They review the school development plan regularly, to check progress of actions being taken. However, there are few measurable targets in the plan; consequently, governors cannot always check the full impact of actions on pupils' progress over time. Governors accept that they have not been sharp enough in checking if the school's website meets Department for Education (DfE) requirements fully.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are robust. Record-keeping for pupils at risk of harm and in need of protection, or who are being supported because of concerns, are meticulously kept and are of a high quality. When warning bells start to ring, you work closely with families and any relevant external agency to secure appropriate early help and support. When disclosures are made or safeguarding concerns identified, timely referrals are made to children's social care or the designated lead for safeguarding in the local authority. Staff are well trained in all aspects of child protection and safeguarding and know how to respond to concerns. Staff are vigilant in ensuring that pupils are safe and understand how to keep safe, from risks in school, when on visits out of school, when online or from risks to their safety in the local community. Work is threaded through the personal, social, citizenship and economic education and tutorial time. This includes detailed work in managing risks from local concerns, such as anti-social behaviour, misuse of drugs and alcohol, knife crime, online grooming and sexual exploitation.

Inspection findings

- In agreement with you, this inspection focused on the progress pupils are currently making in school and the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures. I also focused on the extent to which you, leaders and governors have tackled the areas identified as requiring improvement at the time of the previous inspection.
- Incisive, inclusive leadership has quickly put the school back on track and is now driving the school forward successfully. Senior leaders, teachers and teaching assistants value the way that you have melded a team that works together well. Significant work has been undertaken to raise expectations of staff and pupils alike. Staff share your ambition to do the best for the pupils in Furrowfield. Pupils value the efforts you all make to include them into school life, encourage them to attend, enjoy school and achieve well, often for the first time in their school lives.
- You have developed senior and middle leaders' roles successfully so that you all have a good understanding of what is working well and what needs to improve further. Timely, detailed action plans target weaker areas effectively. Plans, however, do not have sufficient measurable targets against which governors can check fully the impact of your collective work on pupils' progress over time.
- The school is a haven of care and support for pupils who have had previous unsatisfactory experiences of school. The management of behaviour and support for pupils' social, emotional and personal development, alongside the development of the skills they will need to be successful adults, stands out in all the school's work. The broadening range of GCSE subjects pupils now study is ensuring that they leave school with a wider range of qualifications under their belts. This, together with the independent careers guidance and array of work experiences pupils take part in, is helping all pupils move successfully on to their chosen education or training destinations when they leave school.
- Many pupils were out of school for long periods before coming to Furrowfield. Consequently, some arrive with significant gaps in their knowledge and skills. Careful assessments of pupils' abilities on entry, good-quality teaching and targeted individual one-to-one sessions are ensuring that gaps in pupils' learning are tackled and then built on. As a result, pupils make generally good progress over time. Virtually all pupils are entitled to the pupil premium. Because the curriculum is planned to meet each individual pupils' needs and interests, these pupils make similar progress to other pupils. Careful planning of work for the small proportion of girls in the school ensures that their achievements are similar to that of the boys.
- Your recent reviews of teaching have identified that occasionally teachers do not make sure that the most able are stretched sufficiently. This is partly because a new assessment system is being embedded across the school. Teachers do not use information from that system consistently to plan activities that build on pupils' prior skills and knowledge well enough. You are taking action to tackle this.
- Pupils settle into Furrowfield well. They come to classes promptly and the good relationships developed between staff and pupils contributes to pupils' positive

attitudes to learning and improving behaviour. Pupils are friendly and supportive of one another. Breaktimes and lunchtimes are sociable and cordial occasions. Pupils and staff chat together and eat as a 'family group', sharing their thoughts of the day in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. The sometimes impromptu group singing, led by you, livens things up and adds to the sense of community and belonging. Pupils speak highly of the help, advice, support and care provided to them in Furrowfield.

- Governors bring a range of skills and expertise. They work with you and the head of school to drive the school forward successfully. Discussions with them, and evidence from minutes of governing body meetings, show that they ask pertinent questions and provide a good balance of challenge and support. Although they carry out their roles with rigour and commitment, they have not ensured that the school's website meets DfE requirements. For example, they have not ensured that the school's updated and thorough child protection policy is on the website, nor have they ensured that the pupil premium report contains all required information.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- action plans contain measurable targets against which governors can check more accurately the impact of the school's work on pupils' progress over time
- the newly developed assessment system is used consistently by teachers to plan work that stretches the most able pupils
- the school's website is fully compliant with DfE requirements.

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

Yours sincerely

Margaret Farrow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspection team met with you, senior leaders, staff, two representatives of the governing body and a representative from the local authority's school improvement service. We visited a number of classes with you and a senior leader to observe learning and behaviour and to review pupils' workbooks. Inspectors talked informally to pupils in lessons, at breaktime and lunchtime, and formally to a group of pupils. Results from the three parents who wrote comments in Parent View, the Ofsted inspection questionnaire, were taken into account alongside the school's own recent review of parents' views. A range of documents were reviewed, including the school's written evaluation of its work, documents related to safeguarding procedures, pupils' progress information, executive headteacher's reports to governors, minutes of governing body meetings and the school's development plan.