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Mr James Rielly
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Dear Mr Rielly

Short inspection of West Moors Middle School

Following my visit to the school on 6 December 2018 with Jacqui Goodall, HMI, 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 2015.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

There have been changes to staffing since the last inspection. The school has also expanded to include a specialist provision on-site. This is led well and provides ample opportunities for those pupils who attend to develop their resilience as learners. While in its infancy, the provision is proving effective and work is matched to pupils' needs.

You are refining whole-school systems so that they are beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' well-being and learning. You have worked hard with staff to introduce a new behaviour system that gets to the core of teaching effective behaviour management. This is a positive step forward. However, its implementation is very recent and it is not yet used consistently across the school.

Over several years, pupils' progress at the end of key stage 2 has been lower than that seen nationally, particularly in mathematics. By the time pupils leave the school, many pupils have caught up. However, it takes time for this to happen because inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment remain from class to class. Very recently, leaders and governors have shifted the emphasis of their work. As a result, you are all working determinedly on the right aspects for improvement to pupils' outcomes.

However, some aspects of school-wide improvement work have not been fully effective in the past because leaders and governors did not check the implementation of improvement initiatives well enough. As a result, planned improvements to ensure that teaching is closely matched to pupils' needs are not yet sustained in mathematics and some pupils' underachievement continues in key stage 2.

At the last inspection, you were asked to ensure that all pupils learn exceptionally well and ensure that all pupils have a strong desire to learn new skills and knowledge. This work is ongoing. The curriculum is not demanding enough in some year groups. Some pupils get distracted in lessons when they do not receive work that is closely matched to their needs. Teachers do not pick this up quickly enough. Attitudes to learning are much stronger further up the school because work is more suitably challenging. As a result, pupils who have previously fallen behind, catch up well.

Parents' and carers' views of the school are mixed. Some parents raise concerns about the progress their children make and leadership of the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders with designated responsibility for safeguarding work with a variety of external agencies to minimise pupils' risk of serious harm. Staff know how to apply the school's safeguarding practices to make referrals, should they have concerns about pupils' well-being.

However, the school has been slow to update its safeguarding policy in line with changes to legislation this term. Staff training is up to date with current guidance. Pupils say they feel safe and that they know what to do if they have concerns. Statutory safeguarding requirements are met.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry was pupils' attendance. Pupils' absence has been too high over a number of years. One fifth of pupils have been persistently absent in the recent past. Your determined work with key staff in the school and external agencies is impressive. Persistent absence is now reducing quickly as a result of the extensive checks and support you provide. Pupils' overall attendance is still below the national average but is improving steadily. Rates of pupils' exclusions remain too high.
- Another aspect focused on pupils' progress in mathematics. Over a number of years, pupils' progress at the end of key stage 2 has been lower than that seen nationally. While this is not atypical for middle schools nationwide, investigations were undertaken to examine the progress of pupils currently in the school.
- Teaching and pupils' progress in mathematics are too variable. Too few current pupils have the skills and knowledge that are expected for their age because

teaching does not build on what pupils know, can do and understand well enough. Some work on offer is too hard for pupils and for others it is too easy. The most able pupils are not challenged sufficiently. As pupils travel up through the school, some pupils catch up in key stage 3. However, pupils' underachievement in mathematics remains prevalent. Leaders' actions are not yet remedying the weaknesses identified in mathematics quickly enough.

- Another aspect I looked at was the impact of additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The pupil premium is used to provide a range of pastoral and academic support. Disadvantaged pupils make better progress in writing and reading than they do in mathematics. There is no discernible difference between the attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils and others in the school. However, too few disadvantaged pupils catch up to attain the skills and knowledge in line with their age.
- Leaders' management systems to support pupils with SEND are detailed and individual pupils have targets to work through. However, some of these targets are too broad or are not followed up in classwork. This is not picked up quickly enough because the teaching these pupils receive is not checked closely enough.
- My final line of enquiry focused on how well leaders and governors are driving improvement in the school, because pupils' outcomes have been too variable in reading, writing and mathematics in the recent past.
- At times, you have needed to change the roles and responsibilities of middle and senior leaders to tackle weaknesses in school provision when they appear. This has lessened leaders' ability to use a coordinated and well-planned approach to tackle the school's weaknesses head on. Consequently, this has slowed the rate of whole-school improvement.
- Very recently, you have strengthened the plans in place to make the required improvements. However, in the past there has been too little focus on measuring the impact of leaders' work. Across this term, additional external support from the local authority is already paying dividends. As a result, improvements to leaders' systems for checking pupils' progress are improving quickly. However, staff do not yet get the specific feedback they need to ensure that pupils make strong progress over time.
- In recent weeks, changes to the organisation and structure of governing body committees mean that there is a more precise focus on holding leaders to account for improving the impact of teaching on pupils' outcomes. This work continues.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve in key stage 2, and particularly in mathematics, so that 'catch up' in key stage 3 is not required

- leaders' checks on teaching and pupils' progress are robust so that pupils' prior underachievement in reading, writing and mathematics is eradicated quickly
- governors hold leaders to account stringently so that disadvantaged pupils, pupils with SEND and the most able pupils receive teaching that is closely matched to their needs, so that their progress is consistently good.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Carrington
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, inspectors met with you, your deputy headteacher, and other middle leaders. I also met with three members of the governing body. I held a telephone conversation and an additional meeting with a representative from the local authority.

We observed pupils' learning in key stage 2 and key stage 3 and scrutinised their work across a range of subjects.

I considered a range of documentary evidence, including: development plans; external reports of the school's effectiveness; school performance information; monitoring records; governing body minutes; and safeguarding documentation.

In addition, an inspector talked to parents to gather their views at the beginning of the school day. I took account of 21 responses to the Parent View online survey and the free-text messaging service. Inspectors talked to staff about their views of the school.