

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Michael Deane-Hall
Headteacher
Glendale Middle School
15 Brewery Lane
Wooler
Northumberland
NE71 6QF

Dear Mr Deane-Hall

Short inspection of Glendale Middle School

Following my visit to the school on 23 October 2018 with Deborah Ashcroft, 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 February 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Despite substantial changes to the school in recent years, the quality of education has remained good. This is because you and other leaders have been uncompromising and determined to ensure that the curriculum you provide remains broad and relevant. Everyone in the school works hard, recognising the importance of the school to this rural community. Since the last inspection, the governors have shown shrewd strategic awareness. They have formed a federated governing body with Wooler First School and re-located this school onto the same site as Glendale Middle School. They have appointed you as headteacher of both schools and modified most policies to be common across both schools. Together, you have also overseen a restructure of staffing and found ways to cope within a challenging financial climate for the school.

Although these changes have stretched leadership capacity, you and other leaders have ensured that the school is continuing to perform well. Together, you monitor the quality of education and draw valid conclusions about the school's strengths and its weaknesses. Consequently, your improvement plans focus on the most pressing priorities and your actions lead to improvements over time. The school runs smoothly. Your experienced staff have excellent relationships with pupils. The standard of behaviour is exemplary, and pupils consistently apply themselves in purposeful lessons. The broad and balanced curriculum ensures that pupils make good progress across their different subjects, building up their knowledge and understanding and making meaningful connections between different topics.

You have made good progress with the areas for improvement identified in your last inspection. At that time, standards in English lagged behind those being achieved in mathematics. In particular, inspectors asked you to improve pupils' reading and writing skills. In response, you now assess pupils' reading skills when they enter the school and provide extra help for those pupils with skills below those expected for their age. The subject leader for English has also implemented a well-planned English curriculum which is helping to improve the quality of pupils' writing. Outcomes in reading and writing at the end of key stage 2 are now above those seen nationally and match those achieved in mathematics. Pupils continue to make strong progress when they enter key stage 3, which ensures that they are well prepared for transition to high school in Year 9. We agreed that you should also publish on the school's website your plans showing how you use the Year 7 catch-up funding.

In the last inspection, you were also asked to provide more training for middle leaders and to develop their role so that they had a greater effect on improving the quality of provision. Since then, you have accessed appropriate leadership training and made some new appointments, bringing more experience into the school. However, the financial climate the school is facing means that subject leaders have heavy teaching commitments and have limited time in which to fulfil their leadership duties. Consequently, they are not always aware of some weaknesses in teaching that need to be improved. For example, the work set for mixed-ability classes is not tailored enough to challenge the most able pupils, and some teachers do not give enough thought as to how they can ensure that disadvantaged pupils do not fall behind others.

Safeguarding is effective.

The culture in school supports effective safeguarding. This is because your senior leadership team regularly checks the quality of safeguarding arrangements. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You ensure that staff training is up to date and that your policies and practices are in line with the most recent government guidance. Displays around the school and in the staffroom ensure that safeguarding remains high on the agenda and is everyone's business. Parents and carers and pupils who made their views known feel that the school is a safe place. Indeed, pupils told us, 'This school is the safest place on earth.'

Records show that bullying incidents are relatively rare. You did tell us that there is some occasional cyber bullying or unkind comments passed between pupils when online outside school hours. However, your computing curriculum teaches pupils how to avoid this and what to do if it happens. As a result, pupils bring any concerns they have to members of staff, and you quickly sort them out.

Fortunately, there are relatively few incidents when you need to act to protect a child. However, when you do identify risks, you pursue them doggedly to ensure that a resolution can be quickly found. You feel that you get good advice and

support from the local authority and work effectively in partnership with it to protect children at risk of harm or neglect.

Few pupils are absent. Overall, attendance is above the national average and the attendance of disadvantaged pupils matches that of other pupils nationally. You actively challenge families who feel it is acceptable to keep their children off school when seasonal working demands are high, such as harvest time.

Inspection findings

- Standards achieved at the end of key stage 2 have been consistently in line with or above the national averages for reading, writing and mathematics. Your internal assessment information also shows that pupils make good and consistent progress across the curriculum from Year 5 to the end of Year 8. Areas that were weaker, such as pupils' reading and writing, have improved to become a strength of the school. Your work to improve the quality of pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar is also bearing fruit due to the attentive marking and feedback provided to pupils. Occasionally, however, opportunities to reinforce expectations for spelling and grammar in subjects beyond English are missed.
- The attainment of your disadvantaged pupils, who now make up around a third of the school, needs to improve. Last year, provisional data showed that the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who attained the expected standard in reading and mathematics was around 20% below that for other pupils nationally. Since September, you have increased the extra support you provide by giving one-to-one tuition for some disadvantaged pupils during their mathematics and English lessons. Because you track their progress carefully, you know that gaps in attainment between your disadvantaged pupils and others in the school vary across year groups. However, we found little evidence in lessons across the wider curriculum that teachers are doing anything different for their disadvantaged pupils that is likely to narrow these gaps.
- Teaching engages the interest of pupils and the vast majority concentrate well during lessons. Pupils are keen to participate and enjoy answering questions. Teachers know their pupils very well and there is obvious respect between pupils and staff. We found relationships to be particularly positive. We did, however, find that teachers do not tailor the content of their lessons well enough to meet the different needs of pupils. In particular, your most-able pupils are not always challenged enough. As some classes have a broad mix of ability, we agreed, some of your teachers need to become more adept at extending the challenge for the most able pupils.
- Most pupils are keen and avid readers. They make good use of the school library and enjoy the interesting texts they study in lessons. For example, Year 7 pupils are clearly enjoying Michael Morpurgo's novel 'Private Peaceful', which they are using to explore themes in English and history. We found pupils to be accurate readers who are benefiting from the secure phonics teaching they receive in the partner first school. As a result, their more mature reading skills are developing well. They can summarise, infer meaning from the text and draw upon evidence

to support their ideas. The work in their books shows that they are able to analyse a wide range of texts from different genres with increasing skill.

- A well-developed curriculum is at the heart of the school. Following the introduction of the revised national curriculum in 2014, you and your staff have taken on board its raised expectations and remodelled the topics you teach. Pupils study discrete subjects across key stage 2 and key stage 3. As a result, they build up knowledge and skills to a good standard. Some traditional skills are taught effectively. Inspectors saw pupils competently baking shepherd's pie or constructing bird boxes because the components of knowledge had been successfully taught beforehand. Although some teachers teach several subjects, they demonstrate a good command of the subject knowledge required. For example, we observed a physical education teacher challenging the accuracy of pronunciation in a French lesson. In the subjects we sampled, we found curriculum planning set out clearly the knowledge pupils need, and schemes of work set out a sensible sequence of learning. In some subjects, such as English and history, pupils' workbooks show that an ambitious level of knowledge is being taught which is supporting pupils' understanding of the subject well. In mathematics, the curriculum places an emphasis on pupils' grasp of arithmetic skills. Over time, this has ensured that standards of achievement in national curriculum tests have been good, but the new tests, with their more demanding content, mean that more emphasis now needs to be placed on pupils' ability to reason and apply their knowledge to solving problems. As yet, there are not enough planned opportunities in the mathematics curriculum for these aspects of mathematics to be mastered.
- There is a wide variety of enriching activities which give the curriculum character and relevance. Pupils really enjoy the residential opportunities, the inter-schools sports programme, the annual pantomime and community events such as the harvest festival and country dancing held in the school. The recent visit pupils made to a local sawmill helped them to understand how sustainable forestry works and gave them an insight into local career opportunities.
- Governors have steered the school skilfully through a challenging period since the last inspection. Together, you and the governors are managing spending carefully. Your attention to detail has ensured that the school has been able to maintain a good-quality curriculum despite having to make some staff redundant. You clearly have a good working relationship with the governing body and keep governors well informed. New governors are inducted well and quickly make an effective contribution to the overall direction of the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching challenges the most able pupils sufficiently across the full curriculum
- pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills are developed more actively in mathematics

- the gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and others is narrowed further
- plans to support those pupils entering key stage 3 with weaker reading, writing or mathematical skills are published on the school's website.

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

Chris Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, inspectors met with you, the deputy headteacher, subject leaders of English and mathematics, some teachers and two members of the governing body. An inspector also held discussions with a group of pupils. Inspectors visited lessons in key stage 2 and key stage 3 to look at the quality of teaching and learning. During lesson visits, inspectors scrutinised some pupils' workbooks and talked to pupils about their learning and progress. Inspectors also scrutinised a range of pupils' books across a broad range of subjects. Inspectors looked at the 11 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. Inspectors also scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, policies, assessment information and monitoring records. Other documents available on the school's website were also reviewed.

The inspection focused particularly on the progress that pupils are making, the quality and breadth of the curriculum and the effect of leaders' work to improve the quality of reading and writing since the last inspection. Inspectors also looked at the work of governors and the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.