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23 May 2018

Mrs Donna Lee
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Lee

Short inspection of Nettlesworth Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 9 May 2018, 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 November 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Parents and carers who I spoke to or who responded to Ofsted's online survey unanimously praised the school, describing it as 'a fantastic little school' with a 'strong family ethos in which children feel safe and secure'. Members of staff and pupils who spoke to me also described the school as a caring, nurturing place. Across the day, both in lessons and at social times, I saw older pupils working with and supporting younger pupils. It was clear to see that the school's attention to respecting individual rights has had a significant effect and has helped to build a cohesive school community. I found you know the school well and, since being appointed as headteacher in January 2018, have begun to address some areas for improvement with renewed vigour.

In recent years, pupils have made good progress and attained standards in line with, or above, those seen nationally by the time they leave the school. Progress has been particularly good in reading. Children quickly develop an interest in books in the Reception class, because teaching makes reading exciting and enjoyable. Teachers foster strong partnerships with parents who do much to support children's reading at home. Children's reading skills are checked each week. Most children develop a good grasp of the sounds letters make in the Reception class and almost all pupils attain the expected standard in the Year 1 national phonics screening check. As pupils progress through the school, well-designed, purposeful reading activities ensure that their comprehension skills develop well. Outcomes in mathematics have been more average, so this has been a priority area for you this

year. I found that your mathematics subject leader has accessed appropriate external training and introduced new approaches that are now challenging pupils more effectively. Good practice in school is being shared and expectations in most classrooms are rising. Certainly, my checks on pupils' books showed the most able pupils are now making strong progress in mathematics, indicating more are on track to attain the higher standard at the end of key stage 2 this year. Your own tracking shows no difference in levels of attainment across reading, writing and mathematics for pupils currently preparing for national curriculum tests.

In the school's last inspection, leaders were asked to ensure that teaching was consistently good and to accelerate children's progress in the Reception Year. On this inspection I found most teaching to be strong, although some variability still remains, which slows pupils' progress and affects their enthusiasm to learn. I found that leaders' checks on the quality of teaching have not always been objective enough to identify this. Furthermore, leaders have not set precise enough objectives for teachers to be able to hold them to account for pupils' progress. However, in our discussions, it was clear you know where teaching is weaker and you show the necessary resolve to quickly address inconsistencies in the quality of teaching.

Children's progress in the Reception Year has improved. Here, teaching is particularly strong and ensures that children develop as confident learners who are well prepared for Year 1. Outdoor learning areas are now better resourced and you are actively exploring how the building might be adapted to allow children to have easier access to these outdoor facilities. In recent years, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of Reception has been well above that seen nationally.

Safeguarding is effective.

Everyone in the school, including the governors, sees safeguarding as the highest of priorities. Consequently, your policies, procedures and practice are all of high quality. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Members of staff have all received the necessary training and know what actions they must take if they have any concerns about a child. Record-keeping is detailed and thorough.

Your curriculum continually fosters pupils' understanding of how to stay safe. Much is done through assemblies and in daily class discussion time to encourage pupils to share their feelings and resolve any worries they have. Pupils have a well-developed understanding of how to stay safe when online. This open approach ensures that there is little, if any, bullying in the school.

The detailed audit of the school's safeguarding work you recently completed has further refined your practice and ensured the governors are confident everything is being done to keep pupils safe.

Inspection findings

- Most pupils currently in the school are making good academic progress. As headteacher, you have well-developed assessment systems in place to track the progress of all pupils and to check how well different groups of pupils are doing. You have taken sensible steps to improve learning activities in mathematics which have helped to ensure that pupils now make similarly strong progress to that seen in English. In addition, you have reconsidered and redrafted your strategy for the use of pupil premium funding and are checking carefully whether disadvantaged pupils are making good enough progress.
- You know some pupils are making slower progress as a result of weaker teaching. To date, you have provided extra help and support for pupils to compensate for this, but acknowledge that you would benefit from some help from the local authority to manage the performance of teachers more effectively.
- However, you were less aware that pupils' learning across the wider curriculum is also variable, because your checks on teaching have concentrated exclusively on English and mathematics. In some subjects, such as geography, history and art, some topics are covered too superficially, with insufficient new knowledge or vocabulary for pupils to develop a meaningful understanding of important concepts.
- Most teaching is of good quality. Teachers typically think deeply about their aims and objectives in their lesson planning. They skilfully tailor the work they provide to meet the different ages and abilities in their classes. Teachers also foster a strong culture of mutual support in lessons, with older pupils checking younger pupils' work and helping to address any misconceptions they may have. As a result, pupils told me they usually feel challenged and made to think carefully about their work. Pupils take pride in their handwriting and presentation and attain above-average standards in spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- The school fosters pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively. Parents, staff and pupils describe the school as 'a family', emphasising the positive contribution made by the school's work on human rights. This is very much in keeping with the strongly inclusive approach taken by leaders and governors, who go out of their way to understand and meet the individual needs of each child.
- Last year, the level of overall attendance fell below that seen nationally. As a result, you have prioritised attendance as an area for improvement. Parents are very much aware of this, as your newsletters continually stress the importance of coming to school. You have a good range of incentives in place to encourage good attendance and you proactively work with families whose children miss school more regularly. These approaches have brought about some marginal improvements this year, with fewer authorised absences and fewer pupils now missing school persistently.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- checks on the quality of teaching and learning look more comprehensively across the curriculum and more objectively identify the strengths and weaknesses in teachers' practice
- the system for managing teachers' performance is improved, so that teachers are held to account for the progress of their pupils more rigorously
- the quality of the wider curriculum is improved, so that topics are covered in more depth and detail.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Durham. 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, I met with you and the acting deputy headteacher, four members of the governing body, a group of parents and a representative of the local authority. I also met with a group of pupils and listened to some of them read. Together, you and I visited each class to look at the quality of teaching and learning. During lesson visits, I scrutinised some pupils' books and talked to pupils about their learning and progress. I looked in detail at some pupils' mathematics books and other subject books, to evaluate the progress pupils had made over time. I looked at the 57 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also took into account the 11 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the 20 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey. I scrutinised a range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, performance management records, leaders' checks on the quality of teaching, policies and other information available on the school website. I looked particularly at the progress pupils currently in the school are making in mathematics, their progress in the wider curriculum, and your work to improve the quality of teaching. I also looked at your work to improve attendance and the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.