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9 December 2016

Mrs Julia Watkins  
Headteacher  
Blackfell Primary School  
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Dear Mrs Watkins

### **Short inspection of Blackfell Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 9 November 2016, 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 2012.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

Since your appointment as headteacher in September 2012, you have provided exceptional leadership that has brought about significant improvement to the school. Along with the deputy headteacher and other school leaders, you have accurately identified the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. These are clearly outlined in the school's self-evaluation and development plan. The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You and your staff have created an inclusive, harmonious and friendly school. Pupils feel safe, grow in confidence and develop good learning behaviours. They fully understand the five core principles that underpin the ethos of the school and know that their views are highly valued by staff and leaders. Equally, you, your staff and governors set high expectations and aspire to help all pupils achieve the very best outcomes. You and your staff are reflective educators, searching for and developing better practice to further improve outcomes for pupils.

The school has successfully tackled the two areas identified for improvement at the previous inspection. Firstly, carefully planned actions, well led by the current deputy headteacher, have improved the quality of teaching in mathematics across the school. Further developments since the introduction of the new mathematics national curriculum have ensured that you have continued the drive for improvement. The development of a school calculation policy and improving the

teaching of pupils' mathematical reasoning and problem-solving skills are having a positive impact upon pupils' learning. Parents are well informed about developments in mathematics teaching through meetings and useful guidance leaflets. Pupils' outcomes in mathematics have improved as a result of your comprehensive approach. By the end of Year 6, the proportion of pupils working at the expected standard is above that found nationally and the number of pupils working at the higher standard is in line with the national average.

The second area to address, further improving the quality of teaching, has also been tackled. You have maintained the overall good quality of teaching and there are some examples of very strong teaching. This has been achieved alongside a significant change to the staffing profile since the last inspection. You have put in place a well-planned training programme, effectively matched to the needs of individual members of staff, to continually improve teaching skills. Leaders' regular checks demonstrate that this training has a positive impact.

Your review of pupils' outcomes in 2016 has accurately identified that further improvements are needed to develop the teaching of reading. You and the subject leader for English have taken prompt action to address this area for improvement. While the differences between disadvantaged pupils' outcomes and those of others nationally continue to diminish, you are rightly maintaining the focus on this aspect in your improvement plans.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You, your staff and governors give the highest priority to keeping pupils safe. Leaders and governors have ensured that current safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are of a high quality. Careful safeguarding checks are carried out for all staff, governors and volunteers. Leaders have updated the safeguarding policy to ensure that current requirements are met and all staff understand the procedures and their own responsibilities. Staff and governors receive regular and appropriate training so they know how to keep pupils safe, including recent training about how to protect pupils from radicalisation and extremism. Referral to other agencies is well managed and you have a determined and resolute approach to following up any safeguarding cases.

Pupils are well taught about how to keep themselves safe, including when they are online. They have a good understanding of the different forms that bullying can take and know that staff will help them if they ever have concerns. Pupils say that incidents of bullying are rare in their school. The school's records show that incidents of misbehaviour and bullying are infrequent and that these are quickly addressed by the staff. Racist or homophobic incidents are extremely rare, and any that do occur are rigorously followed up by school leaders. Pupils, parents and staff agree that the school is a safe place to be.

## Inspection findings

- Since your appointment, you have successfully identified the key priorities to address and have taken robust action to drive forward improvement. As a result, the quality of teaching has been strengthened, a more appropriate leadership structure is in place and the school buildings have been improved to provide a good-quality learning environment.
- Overall, pupils make good progress and are attaining at levels above those found nationally, particularly in writing and mathematics. The differences between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, and that of others are diminishing. However, you recognise that there is further work to do here to address the dip in some disadvantaged pupils' progress in reading in 2016.
- You have in place very thorough systems for checking the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Findings from this monitoring are well used to plan training that continuously improves the quality of teaching across the school.
- Governors provide good strategic challenge and support for leaders. They are ambitious to achieve the best academic outcomes and personal development for pupils.
- The deputy headteacher provides strong leadership in mathematics. This has brought about good improvements in the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. His work in developing a well-tailored programme of staff training demonstrates leaders' sharp focus on continued development of this subject.
- The subject leader for English has a good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement. She has put in place actions to improve pupils' progress in English, including in developing their skills in reading, and she completes regular checks to measure the impact of these actions. There is early evidence in books that the school's approaches to improving pupils' reading comprehension skills are beginning to have a positive impact. Pupils across a range of abilities read confidently and with understanding. Occasionally, the text for older pupils is too short to develop their stamina for reading at length. You recognise that the development of reading is a work in progress and the new approaches are not fully embedded across school.
- The teaching of phonics is well structured, and teaching is carefully matched to pupils' level of development. As a result, the proportion of pupils who are achieving the expected standard has been above that found nationally for the last three years.
- Overall, your school's attendance levels are higher than those found nationally. This is because good attendance has a high profile around the school and pupils understand the importance of good attendance and punctuality. Wherever pupils' absence levels are a concern, you take prompt action to provide guidance and support for pupils and their families. This has a positive impact upon improving attendance levels in the vast majority of instances.

- In the early years provision, children's outcomes have improved and the proportion achieving a good level of development has been above the national average for the last two years. Generally, children are making good progress from their starting points and are well prepared to start Year 1. You have analysed the factors that resulted in a dip in the proportion of disadvantaged children achieving a good level of development in 2016. Well-planned provision is in place to support the learning of these pupils in Year 1.
- High staff expectations, a caring atmosphere and opportunities for individual and group responsibility effectively develop pupils' personal and social skills. As a result, pupils' behaviour in lessons and at playtimes is exemplary. They work hard, are kind and supportive to their peers and display very good manners.
- School leaders are outward looking and work in collaboration with other schools to develop effective practice. For example, the school is currently working with local schools to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Similarly, the subject leader for English is attending training to identify effective practice to improve the quality of the teaching of reading.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school's plan to improve progress in reading is implemented and regular checks are made to ensure that this is improving pupils' progress across the school
- the differences in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and that of others nationally continue to diminish by implementing the school's well-planned actions, including collaboration with other schools.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Reeves  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During this one-day inspection, I discussed the work of the school with you, the deputy headteacher and the key stage 2 leader. I talked with pupils about what it feels like to be a member of the school community. I observed and spoke with pupils during playtime and at other times during the day. I held discussions with your school improvement partner and with three governors who were able to provide me with additional information. I also took into account school documentation, assessment information, policies and information posted on the school website. I considered the 19 responses to the parent questionnaire, Parent View. Alongside you, I visited almost all classes to observe teaching and learning, during which time I listened to pupils from a range of abilities read. We looked at pupils' mathematics, phonics and reading work to help us evaluate the quality of teaching and learning over time. Behaviour and attendance records and information relating to safeguarding were also considered.

This inspection particularly focused upon the following aspects of the school's work:

- the impact of leaders and governors on addressing areas for improvement in the previous inspection report
- the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in mathematics, reading and phonics, and current pupils' progress in these subjects
- the impact of the actions of leaders and staff to improve pupils' attendance levels
- children's progress in the early years.