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18 October 2017

Mr Paul Anderson
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Dear Mr Anderson

Short inspection of Northway Primary and Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 10 October 2017, 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 have been headteacher at this school for 20 years and have a proven track record of delivering good outcomes for pupils to ensure that they have the best possible start in life. You have created a team of strong and caring staff who put pupils' well-being and learning at the heart of all that the school does.

Over the last two years, there has been considerable change. The school has moved into a much larger building and the number of pupils attending increased by 40% in 2015. Mobility is now high, and as a result, the published data for the last two academic years must be treated with caution. Consequently, when looking at pupils' progress over time, I gave more weight to the school's information on pupils' progress and achievement than to the published data.

Last year, there was some turbulence in staffing, with some key members of staff absent for a significant period of time. All staffing issues have been resolved and the school is now back on an even keel. You are clear-sighted and your self-evaluation is accurate and honest. I am impressed by you and your staff's commitment and passion to make things even better.

Pupils at Northway make good progress over time. However, you quite rightly recognise that the numbers of pupils reaching the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics could be even higher across the school. You, and your

staff, have not shied away from this challenge and the wheels have already started turning to address this issue. For example, the learning environment across the school has been revamped to give reading a higher profile. Monthly reading challenges are set for pupils, tailored to their needs. The school has also revised its approach to the teaching of guided reading to further improve outcomes. Sharp and timely interventions are now in place to identify quickly pupils who are at risk of falling behind in reading and equally those who are racing ahead. Non-attendance at school also has a negative impact on pupils' progress and attainment. We both agree that, although improving, the school needs to consider other initiatives to encourage more pupils to attend school on a regular basis.

The effective and strong leadership that you and senior leaders provide is highly valued by your staff. There is a strong sense of teamwork and staff are proud to work at the school. They share your passion to drive forward improvements at a pace to ensure that each and every pupil achieves to the best of their ability. They appreciate the feedback that you give them to improve their practice after formal lesson observations. However, you agreed with me that this is not as detailed as it could be. The opportunities that you provide for staff to observe each other's practice in school, and at other schools locally, are greatly appreciated. Teachers who are new to the profession also feel valued and supported.

With your support and encouragement, staff feel empowered to develop their roles in education. For example, middle leaders have revised the approach to the teaching of subjects such as history and geography. They have also devised their own assessment procedures for these subjects. Lessons are now taught discretely, using a skills-based approach. The positive impact of this is evident for all to see, from the writing in pupils' books to the in-depth discussions that pupils had with me about what they had learned in both of these subjects. To top it all, the local authority is now using your school as an exemplar of good practice for the teaching of the foundation subjects. Furthermore, the school's approach to the assessment of these subjects is being cascaded to other schools in the locality.

Most parents hold you and your staff in high regard. They typically comment: 'Northway is a well-run school with a high level of achievement.' They appreciate the 'good level of support that the school provides' to families who are facing significant challenges. A small number of parents did express some concerns about bullying, but inspection evidence does not support this.

As we toured the school, I observed polite and well-behaved pupils who are a credit to the school and their families. Their joy at being at school is evident from their happy, smiley faces, which never waver throughout the day. Relationships at all levels are respectful.

Pupils were very keen to talk to me. They are very proud of their school, feel safe and enjoy attending. They talked avidly about the interesting range of trips, for example to Chester Zoo, Tatton Park, Allerton Towers and the Maritime Museum, which you arrange to broaden their experiences and ignite their passion for learning. They spoke to me, most eloquently, in French. You provide a wide range

of activities after school, which pupils clearly appreciate and enjoy. It is clear that pupils do have an active voice in the school and contribute to decision-making, for example as reading champions, digital leaders, eco warriors and members of the school council. A warm welcome is given to all new pupils, irrespective of their race, gender and culture.

Governors share your vision and passion for the school. They know the school well and the progress that different groups of pupils are making. They offer you good levels of support and challenge in equal measure. Governors are aware that the school website is not compliant with the information that must be published on it.

Following the last inspection you were asked to ensure that pupils are more engaged during lessons and that the activities provided are suitable and demanding. Both of these issues have been addressed. Lessons now move at a brisk pace to ensure that pupils do not lose concentration and are engaged. To provide more challenge for pupils, they are now taught in ability groups for certain lessons such as phonics. This ensures that the most able pupils are provided with activities which make them think harder.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are thorough. Leaders carry out comprehensive checks to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children. Staff are aware that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. All have completed relevant training and have read part 1 of 'Keeping children safe in education'. They have a good awareness of procedures to follow should they be concerned about a pupil's welfare. Staff also talk with confidence about the latest national concerns regarding extremism, sexual exploitation and female genital mutilation. The school works well with other stakeholders and parents to ensure that pupils are kept safe. Pupils believe that bullying is rare. They are, however, confident that, if it did occur, staff would soon sort it out. Staff, pupils and the vast majority of parents agree that children are safe and well cared for.

Inspection findings

- Children get off to a flying start to their education in the early years. From their various starting points, which are for some significantly below those typical for their age, children make good progress in their learning. During our learning walk we observed happy, confident children in early years. They displayed good levels of confidence and cooperated well together, sharing and taking turns as they played. All children were purposefully engaged listening to stories, counting, writing simple words and making models with boxes, straws and string. As a result of changes to the environment and the curriculum, a greater proportion of boys and disadvantaged children achieved a good level of development in 2017 than in 2016.
- As we moved through key stage 1, we saw more happy, confident pupils who were keen to learn. They worked well together, using practical apparatus, to solve number problems. Others were writing sentences, sequencing a story in the

correct order using words such as 'first', 'then', 'next' and 'after'. We observed groups of pupils in Year 2 grouping facts into subheadings. All pupils that we observed made good progress. However, from looking at a sample of pupils' books across the school, we agree that pupils are not consistently challenged in mathematics, most notably at key stage 1. In addition, pupils in key stage 1 do not have enough opportunities to solve real-life mathematical problems and record their reasoning. Although books show pupils writing at length across a range of subjects, we agree that at times the use of worksheets with small boxes prevents some pupils writing at greater depth.

- Pupils love to read. Younger pupils make good use of their phonic knowledge to sound out unfamiliar words. Comprehension skills are developing well. For example, a Year 2 pupil explained to me that a robot is 'a metal object made out of squares and it talks funnily'. Older pupils talk confidently about their book preferences and favourite authors. However, on occasions, pupils find the books they are reading too easy.
- Attendance is a thorny issue. The school has been successful in encouraging more disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities to attend school more regularly. However, overall attendance figures are still stubbornly below the national average and the 97% set by Liverpool. Good attendance is constantly celebrated in a variety of ways and any unexplained absences are diligently followed up.
- You and your staff give care and consideration as to how the pupil premium funding is spent. Your staff know these pupils well. They have a good awareness of the barriers that stop this group of pupils from learning. The money is spent wisely to support these pupils academically, socially and emotionally. During their time at the school these pupils flourish and the gap with others nationally continues to close.
- You keep a close eye on the quality of teaching. This is done through formal lesson observations, data analysis, learning walks, book scrutiny and discussion with pupils. However, we both agree that the feedback given to teachers after lesson observations does not provide them with enough detailed information on the progress that different groups of pupils are making.
- The school's website is bright, colourful and easy to navigate. It contains a wealth of information to help parents appreciate what is going on in school. However, there are omissions regarding the information that must be published. Information relating to the impact of the spending of the sports premium funding is not detailed. The special educational needs (SEN) report does not evaluate the effectiveness of the provision for this group of pupils. Furthermore, information on the early years curriculum lacks the required detail.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- a greater proportion of pupils from all groups reach the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics at both key stages 1 and 2

- feedback after formal lesson observations provides more detail about the learning that has taken place for different groups of pupils
- more pupils attend school on a regular basis
- the website is compliant and is checked regularly by governors to ensure that it remains so.

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

Yours sincerely

Sheila Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your senior leadership team, staff, a representative from the local authority and members of the governing body. I also had discussions with pupils to seek their views of the school. We went on a tour of the school to see the learning that was taking place, focusing on the early years and key stage 1. I looked at some examples of pupils' work and observed the behaviour of pupils in class and as they moved around the school. I reviewed a range of documentation, including the single central record, the school's tracking system and records relating to the monitoring of teaching and learning. I also took account of the responses to Parent View, the online Ofsted questionnaire, completed by 31 parents, 15 pupils and one member of staff.