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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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22 March 2018

Mr Mick Mingstones
Headteacher
West Denton Primary School
Hillhead Road
West Denton
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Tyne and Wear
NE5 1DN

Dear Mr Mingstones

Short inspection of West Denton Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 13 March 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 December 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Determined and effective leadership has ensured that the school has adapted well to the higher expectations of the national curriculum. Teachers have a good understanding of the standards expected of pupils and most plan and deliver challenging lessons that move pupils forward. In recent years, pupils have made increasingly good progress in each phase of the school. Last year, pupils made significantly more progress than seen nationally in reading and mathematics across key stage 2. Their progress in writing was also stronger than that seen nationally, with over 40% of pupils attaining a high standard in spelling, punctuation and grammar. As a result, the proportion of pupils who attained the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6 in 2017 was well above the national average. Last year, disadvantaged pupils also made better progress and attained standards above other pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics, demonstrating that the pupil premium is being used wisely.

At the time of the last inspection, standards in writing were weaker than in other subjects. Since then, you and your deputy headteacher have done much to improve the quality of writing. You have looked carefully at how learning is organised in the early years, to ensure that children's interest and curiosity in sounds and letters is stimulated as early as possible. In the Nursery, we watched children using their fingers to join the dots on displays of numbers and letters while others chose to

write letters on chalkboards. Other children took one another's orders on note pads as they role played ordering food in a café. In the Reception Year, the teaching of writing is now far more structured and adult-led than in the past. Well-resourced lessons each morning ensure that children develop a good grasp of the sounds that letters make. Children are taught to sit at a table and write with pencil and paper each day. They quickly progress from learning how to form single letters to writing common words and short sentences. The work in their books shows they continue to progress quickly in key stage 1. By Year 2, pupils are able to communicate their ideas clearly, using a variety of sentences in well-organised paragraphs. In particular, the school's strategy to encourage the use of rich vocabulary is working well. New and ambitious words are promoted on classroom displays and on the tables where pupils work. The approach is helping pupils to make their writing lively and interesting to read. At key stage 2, pupils have frequent opportunities to write at length and the curriculum ensures they learn to write for a range of different purposes. For example, writing for the school newspaper very effectively promotes pupils' understanding of journalistic techniques.

You and other leaders have secure systems in place to check on the quality of teaching. Governors also take an active role in looking at pupils' work and talking to them about their learning and progress. Your checks show a large majority of teaching is of a good or better standard. In my visits to lessons, I found this to be the case, although there were a few occasions when opportunities to deepen pupils' understanding were missed or the teaching moved too slowly to build on the knowledge and understanding pupils already had. It was clear in our discussions, however, you know where teaching needs to improve and you have sound arrangements in place to support teachers to develop their practice. A strength of teaching is the way the tasks provided are adapted and tailored for pupils with different starting points. Teachers are adept at planning work that becomes increasingly challenging. In most lessons, therefore, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are catered for well and the most able pupils are made to think deeply. Pupils did tell me, however, that sometimes teachers hold back the really challenging work until late in the lesson, when they felt ready for it sooner.

Members of staff who completed Ofsted's staff questionnaire and the parents I spoke to all felt the school has improved since the last inspection. Parents were keen to praise the wide variety of experiences provided beyond the school site, such as residential trips, long-distance cycling events and bush-craft sessions, which they described as motivational and character-building. Parents and staff also told me they consider the school to be a safe and secure place where incidents of bullying are dealt with quickly and decisively. Everyone feels behaviour in the school is good. I certainly found pupils to be polite and courteous throughout my visit. It was good to see older pupils readily volunteering to take younger pupils back to their classrooms at the end of my meeting with them. Attendance remains a challenge, however. Last year, governors pressed you to improve this position, as overall attendance was below the national average for primary schools and the proportion of pupils who missed school regularly was above that seen nationally. Despite a raft of new strategies, including new rewards and the more determined use of

sanctions, attendance for the year has not improved. There are still more than 50 pupils who have missed more than 10% of their education this year. Where you have set up contracts with families whose children miss school regularly, there have been improvements in their attendance, but too many families have been unwilling to engage with this approach.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your leadership team take your responsibilities for safeguarding pupils seriously and have ensured that all members of staff remain vigilant. Your policies are up to date and most procedures run smoothly, although some minor omissions from the school's record of vetting checks on adults who work in the school needed to be corrected during the inspection. Members of staff understand what to do if they have any concerns about a child's welfare or safety. You keep thorough records of all the actions you take to protect pupils at risk and work effectively with external agencies, such as social services and the police, to achieve positive outcomes.

Your broad curriculum, with its strong emphasis on developing life skills and raising aspirations through adventurous activities beyond the classroom, is thoroughly risk-assessed. This has ensured that everything is done to keep pupils safe when out of school. You and the governors have also taken steps to improve site security and considered carefully the procedures you would need to enact in the case of an emergency.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Inspection findings

- The senior leadership team, well supported by middle leaders in each phase of the school, is ambitious and committed to improving the quality of education. You ensure that most teaching is well planned and adapted to meet the differing needs of pupils. You provide a rich and varied curriculum that makes a positive contribution to pupils' academic and personal development. You track the attainment of pupils carefully and provide well-targeted additional help for those who need it. However, your systems for tracking pupils' progress over time are less well developed and do not easily show the progress pupils have made from the point they enter key stages. Consequently, it is more difficult for you to hold teachers to account for the progress of pupils in their classes.
- The governing body provides effective oversight of the school. Their knowledge and experience ensure that they are well placed to support and challenge effectively. They have good arrangements in place to hold leaders to account in their meetings and committees. Governors make regular visits to learn about the school's work for themselves. They undertake visits to lessons, check the quality of work in pupils' books, interview pupils and check for evidence that initiatives they have chosen to fund are having a positive effect on pupils' learning. As a result, they are well informed about the school's strengths and weaknesses.

- Children make an increasingly good start in the early years. Tighter organisation and greater ambition has led to a steady rise in the proportion of children attaining a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year. Leaders have ensured that adults who work in the early years directly teach children basic skills in reading, writing and number. Although children enter the Nursery with skills that are a little below those typical for their age, they make good progress and enter Year 1 well prepared with the skills and attitudes necessary to begin the national curriculum.
- Reading and writing skills are taught effectively. Most children quickly acquire a secure grasp of the sounds letters make as a result of the frequent and sharply focused teaching they receive in the Reception Year. Outcomes in the Year 1 national phonics screening check have risen steadily over recent years to be above the national average. The younger pupils I listened to clearly enjoyed reading and demonstrated a good level of fluency and comprehension. Leaders and governors are fully aware, however, that a small number of pupils continues to begin key stage 2 with weak reading skills. Regular additional support is being provided for these pupils using a variety of approaches.
- Pupils currently in the school are making good progress across a broad range of subjects. Achievement in mathematics is strong because teachers have good subject knowledge and regularly set challenging tasks. Pupils' books show they take pride in their work and care with their handwriting and presentation. In lessons, they show good attitudes to learning and they sustain their concentration well. However, levels of overall attendance are too low and there are too many pupils missing school often. Improving attendance therefore remains a priority for the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the actions being taken to improve overall attendance and reduce the number of pupils who miss school regularly are sustained and evaluated regularly to see if they are being successful
- more-effective systems for tracking the progress of pupils are developed and that information on pupils' progress is used to improve accountability in the school
- expertise in the school is used to reduce variability in the quality of teaching and to ensure teaching is consistently challenging.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Newcastle upon Tyne. 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, your deputy headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, attendance officer and the school welfare officer. I also met with a group of governors and a representative of the local authority. I held discussions with a group of pupils and listened to some of them read. Together, you and I visited lessons in the early years and key stage 1 to look at the effect of your work to improve the teaching of reading and writing. I also made further visits to lessons in key stage 2 to look at the quality of teaching. During lesson visits I sampled pupils' books and talked to pupils about their learning and progress. I looked in detail at some pupils' work with the deputy headteacher, in order to evaluate the progress pupils had made over time. I also walked around the school to look at pupils' behaviour and conduct. I met with a group of parents, because there were few responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I looked at a range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, policies and other information available on the school website. I focused particularly on the teaching of reading and writing, the standard of teaching more widely and the quality of leadership, including governance. I also looked closely at your work to improve attendance and the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.