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Mrs Charlotte Ferguson
Acting headteacher
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Dear Mrs Ferguson

Short inspection of Neville's Cross Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 25 April 2019, 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 second short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in May 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. In September 2018, the substantive headteacher began a secondment with the local authority. Since then, you have stepped up and taken on the school's leadership with confidence and an absolute determination to uphold high standards. You have formed an effective leadership team with your new deputy headteacher and, together, you are stamping your personalities on the school. You are not complacent. You know the school very well and are acting where you believe improvements can be made. The vast majority of parents and carers continue to be very supportive and pleased with the school. In their written responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, many told me that they believe the school provides a well-balanced education that fosters their children's academic and personal development effectively. Almost all the parents who responded to Parent View would recommend the school.

The governing body works to a clear set of values, which are evident in the day-to-day running of the school. The school is inclusive. Themed weeks actively promote diversity and the curriculum places a strong emphasis on the development of the whole child. I noted pupils running a daily mile at the start of the day, the forest school activities, a singing assembly and an inclusive approach to sport. All were taking place as typical school activities. In our visits to lessons, we also noted the calm, purposeful and studious approach to learning that typified each classroom. Pupils listened intently and applied themselves fully when working independently. A characteristic of the school was the way in which pupils collaborated effectively and supported one another to learn. It is not surprising therefore that, over time, levels of attendance have been above average, incidents of bullying are rare and

behaviour is exemplary.

You and your teachers strive for academic excellence. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics have remained above those seen nationally since the school's last inspection. Last year, by the end of key stage 2, the proportion of pupils attaining the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was 10% above the national average. Furthermore, the proportion of pupils who attained the higher standard at this measure was 12% above the national average. These outcomes demonstrate that you have successfully addressed the areas for improvement that were identified in the school's last inspection. Standards over time have also been above average at the end of key stage 1. You are aware that the standards attained in the Year 1 phonics screening check and at the end of Reception last year were only in line with national averages and you feel, given the starting points of children, that they should be better. Consequently, these areas are a focus for you this year. The school has relatively few disadvantaged pupils. Those currently in the school are making similar progress to others in the school and attaining similar standards to other pupils nationally.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You are highly vigilant and ensure that all members of staff adopt the same approach and attitude. Although you have not needed to make many child protection referrals to other agencies, you ensure that safeguarding has a high profile. Safeguarding is a standing agenda item on senior leadership team meetings and your weekly briefing ensures that the staff are well informed and clear about their responsibilities.

In staff training sessions, you regularly check how staff would respond to different safeguarding scenarios. This approach has helped to keep staff aware of issues such as radicalisation, child sexual exploitation and online safety. Your staff are trained to think 'it could happen here', and therefore act in a vigilant manner. You have the capacity to support more vulnerable pupils and work closely with families if you identify any concerns.

The curriculum supports pupils' personal development and safety effectively. For example, pupils learn how to stay safe online, about friendships, different types of families and healthy eating. This rounded approach contributes to pupils feeling safe and secure in school and beyond.

Inspection findings

- In this inspection, I wanted to check if pupils currently in the school are continuing to make good progress. I found that you have refined how you assess pupils' progress since the last inspection and that you and the governors use assessment information intelligently. Together, you use it to identify where progress is strong and where it is less so. Your assessment information shows that progress rates are strong for most pupils, although there is some variability

and a few pupils are not making the progress they should. You have identified, for example, that some Year 3 pupils have not made the progress expected so far this year. You have analysed why and, in response, made some changes to the way you group classes in lower key stage 2. These changes have only just been made and therefore it is too early to know if they will be beneficial for pupils.

- Pupils in the current Year 6 are attaining particularly well. Your assessments indicate that around two thirds of the cohort are on track to attain the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics this year. My checks on the quality and complexity of the work in their mathematics books support this view. Pupils take great pride in their work. They set out their work methodically and confidently draw on their mathematical knowledge to tackle problems. I found the teaching of mathematics to be consistently good across the school. The careful monitoring of teaching by the subject leader, and her subsequent training for colleagues, has helped to improve the balance of activities within the mathematics curriculum.
- Your work to improve pupils' early reading development is also bearing fruit. You recognised that teachers were using different approaches to the teaching and assessment of phonics last year. Together with the deputy headteacher, you have reviewed this and streamlined teaching methods to be more consistent. You now track pupils' progress in phonics more rigorously and group pupils more carefully, so that teaching is more sharply attuned to their needs. The phonics teaching we observed together was effective in building pupils' confidence and fluency.
- By the end of key stage 1, almost all pupils can read at the standard expected for their age. However, this year, some pupils have not made the progress expected in their first year in key stage 2. This has also slowed their progress in writing. I listened to some of these pupils read and found that, although they could decode words effectively, they lacked fluency and did not use punctuation well. This indicates that more reading practice is needed, or weaknesses in their comprehension of texts are likely to increase as they move through the school.
- During the inspection, we also discussed the design of the curriculum. This was because I noticed that a review of the curriculum is a priority in your school improvement plan. I learned that you want to increase the time for pupils to study the wider curriculum subjects such as history, geography and art. You explained that you want to ensure that pupils develop knowledge and understanding within these subjects as rigorously as they do in English and mathematics. This term, you have begun to trial the use of some commercially produced curriculum materials and you hope to have new curriculum planning fully in place for September. However, I was not convinced that you and the staff have a well-developed rationale for these changes, or clear enough plans for implementing your revised curriculum. It was not clear, for example, how you would improve the sequencing of knowledge taught within subject disciplines while maintaining a topic-based approach.
- As changes have been made to the leadership of the school this year, I wanted to check whether the governors were providing the necessary scrutiny, support

and challenge for a new leadership team. I found governors to have a good balance of experience, vision and energy. Governors feel that their roles have been revitalised by the current chair of the governing body. The governors have realigned how they monitor the work of the school and consequently have become more active. As a result, they know the school well. They have skilfully supported you to address a shortfall in the school budget so that staffing levels can be sustained. Their vision for nursery provision at the school is now being realised, with healthy numbers of children in the nursery this year. Furthermore, their careful scrutiny of in-year tracking data is ensuring strong accountability across the whole school. Governors are strategic in approach and work with clear moral purpose.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all pupils in lower key stage 2 build on the good start they make in key stage 1 and continue to make good progress, especially in reading and writing
- they carefully plan and implement changes to the curriculum at a realistic pace, so that pupils acquire a richer knowledge, skills and understanding across the foundation subjects.

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, the subject leader for mathematics, the chair of the governing body and five other governors. I also met with a representative of the local authority. I talked to a group of pupils and listened to some Year 1 and some Year 3 pupils read. Together, you and I visited lessons in the Nursery class, a Reception class and classes in key stages 1 and 2 to look at the quality of teaching and learning. During lesson visits, I checked some pupils' books and talked to some pupils about their learning and progress. The mathematics subject leader and I looked in detail at some pupils' mathematics books. The sample of books selected covered pupils with different starting points and from different key stages. In the afternoon, I visited lessons to observe some teaching in subjects other than English and mathematics and sampled some topic books. I looked at the 130 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and considered the five responses to Ofsted's staff survey. I scrutinised a range of documentation including

the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, policies and assessment information. I also checked other documents available on the school website. I focused particularly on the progress of pupils currently in the school, especially in mathematics, and the breadth and balance of the curriculum. I also looked at the work of governors and the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.