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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mr Edward Jackson
Headteacher
Ferryhill Station Primary School
Ferryhill Station
Ferryhill
County Durham
DL17 0DB

Dear Mr Jackson

Short inspection of Ferryhill Station Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 9 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 June 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Since taking up the post of headteacher in September 2015, you have been diligent in striving to improve opportunities for pupils and their families. You have managed to sustain a warm, positive culture during a period of high turbulence in terms of staffing and governance. Your understanding of the school's current strengths and weaknesses is honest and accurate. Staff, the local authority and pupils have faith in your dedicated leadership and management. You have successfully instilled in others a shared enthusiasm for your vision of improvement. Better stability recently, particularly in terms of governance, puts you in a strengthened position to realise your clearly held ambition for all pupils.

Governors bring a wide-ranging set of skills and know-how from their own fields of expertise. They are keen and fully committed to the school. The governing body is recently formed, however, and as such, untested. Governors are keen to develop a deeper understanding of the school's performance and their particular roles in its improvement. Several have already attended training to enhance their expertise and understanding of school governance. This puts you and other leaders in a strong position to benefit from governors' increasing support and challenge. It is too soon to measure the extent to which governors contribute to school development.

The previous inspection report challenged leaders to accelerate pupils' progress in writing, making sure that a higher proportion of pupils reached greater depths of learning in writing. Boys, and the most able pupils in particular, were to be offered more regular opportunities to write at length. You have had some success. In key stage 2, pupils' progress in writing has been in the top 20% for the last two academic years. Despite this, too few pupils reach age-related expectations in writing; pupils' attainment in writing in key stage 2 has remained in the bottom 20% of all schools over the last two years. Not all teachers, across key stages, match tasks accurately to meet the needs and interests of pupils, specifically the most able pupils or boys. You have correctly identified that writing requires further improvement and acknowledge that pupils continue to lack opportunities to write at length across subjects.

In order to equip pupils with the knowledge, skills and understanding needed to write well, you have quite rightly turned your attention to pupils' reading. You recognise that, over time, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standards in reading compared to other pupils nationally is too variable. Currently, disadvantaged pupils and boys are least likely to achieve well in reading. Not all pupils, especially the most able, have sufficient challenge in their reading or enough opportunities to read with adults in school. This is particularly evident in key stage 2. Your improvement plans fittingly identify reading as a key area of focus. Plans lack detail, however, and do not focus sufficiently on monitoring and improving the quality of teaching and learning within reading.

In partnership with the local authority, you are working with parents and carers to reduce the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school. You have taken several steps to support pupils and their families to understand the importance of good attendance and behaviour and the links to pupils' future success. Nonetheless, some pupils are still too regularly absent from school and, although reducing, the proportion of pupils subject to fixed-term exclusions remains too high.

Your careful reflections upon pupils' outcomes across the curriculum have led you to consider the leadership and management of subjects. The high turnover in staff has meant that some subjects have taken a back seat recently, as leadership expertise has come and gone. Currently, therefore, not all areas of the curriculum are monitored or assessed with sufficient rigour and consistency.

Safeguarding is effective.

You hold pupils' safety and welfare in the highest regard and demand that others do too. Appropriately, rigorous checks on the suitability of adults working with pupils are part and parcel of your recruitment procedures. Staff are suitably trained on child protection and safeguarding matters. You ensure that frequent updates mean that the most recent guidance and information is understood. Consequently, staff know how and to whom they should report any concerns that they may have.

Mindful of pupils' protection and well-being, you have altered and enhanced the school environment. New toilet blocks benefit pupils in terms of hygiene. A new entranceway has reduced risks for pupils; pupils say that the new entry and exit systems make them feel safe. The recently developed early years outdoors area has had a positive, buoyant effect on children's learning, health and fitness.

Pupils are well informed about the benefits and risks of the internet, social media and digital equipment; older pupils, in particular, speak knowledgeably about reporting any concerns that may arise when using information technology.

Pupils enjoy school. They are friendly, well-mannered and confident in discussions with visitors. Pupils feel certain that there are adults in school to whom they can turn if they have any worries. This contributes well to pupils' feeling of being valued and respected. Occasional incidents of poor behaviour lead to individuals being excluded from school for short periods of time. You are keenly aware that these infrequent events disrupt learning for the individual and, at times, their peers. You are working closely with a range of external agencies and professional partners to support pupils and their families in this regard.

Inspection findings

- Some teachers ensure that pupils read frequently with adults in school. In some classes, detailed, well-maintained records support staff to shape reading activities and materials to suit pupils' needs and interests. At times, teachers deliberately and rapidly expand pupils' vocabulary across subjects. They design comprehension tasks that stretch pupils in their thinking. Systems, and the quality of teaching and learning in reading, however, are not consistent from class to class or across key stages. Not all pupils, especially in key stage 2, read frequently or have sufficient challenge in their reading. Leaders' monitoring of reading is not thorough. Improvement plans do not pinpoint precisely where teaching and learning need to improve or how leaders will secure better outcomes for pupils in reading. As a result, not all pupils make the progress in reading that staff should expect of them.
- The quality of teaching and learning in writing varies across key stages. You have successfully raised teachers' awareness of the value of improving pupils' presentation in books. As a result, some teachers have heightened expectations in terms of the quality and quantity of writing pupils can produce. These teachers build upon pupils' existing skills effectively, planning writing tasks that ignite pupils' imagination. Such strengths, however, are not consistent. The most able pupils and boys, in particular, are not suitably stretched or inspired to write at length in subjects across the curriculum.
- The large majority of pupils behave well and conduct themselves sensibly in and around the school. They talk politely and confidently with visitors and are keen to share their views of the school. Pupils feel safe, enjoy school and are confident that teachers listen carefully to them and support them to do their best. They say 'teachers are great' and are certain that on the rare occasions that bullying takes

place, staff are good at resolving issues. At times, however, instances of poor behaviour and irregular attendance interrupt pupils' learning.

- You work closely with a wide range of external partners to support pupils and families, using exclusion as a 'last resort' where issues of poor behaviour arise. Any necessary referrals to external agencies are made in a timely fashion. Consequently, the rate of fixed-term exclusions has fallen recently. You are aiming for 'zero' exclusions and are rightly committed to reducing instances further still, to at least match national averages.
- The local authority and other partners have worked with you to reduce the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school. With health professionals, for example, you created a leaflet about minor ailments and school attendance. You have raised pupils' and families' awareness of the effect that absence has on pupils' future success. Pupils' good attendance is rewarded and clear steps are in place to address absence. Despite leaders' actions, however, the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school remains too high.
- Since taking up headship, you have focused first and foremost on improving pupils' outcomes in the core subjects of reading, writing and mathematics. You recognise that pupils' achievements in other subjects, such as science, geography and history, have been scrutinised and assessed less thoroughly. In addition, subject leadership is underdeveloped. Not all leaders monitor or develop teaching and learning in their subjects effectively. Currently, therefore, leaders' and governors' understanding of pupils' progress across the wider curriculum is too vague and unreliable.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers match writing tasks closely to pupils' interests and needs, offering enough challenge and frequent opportunities to write at length across the curriculum, particularly for boys and the most able
- pupils' reading is monitored thoroughly and improvement plans specify precisely how the teaching and learning of reading will be developed, especially in key stage 2
- the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent and/or who receive fixed-term exclusions from school reduces to at least match national averages
- subjects across the curriculum are monitored and assessed with improved rigour.

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

Fiona Manuel
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders. You and I jointly observed teaching, learning and assessment in classes across key stages. I scrutinised work in pupils' books, listened to pupils read, spoke with pupils from each key stage and considered the responses by 13 pupils to Ofsted's online questionnaire. I reviewed school documentation and information, including policies, assessment information, monitoring files and your school improvement plans. I met with governors, including the chair of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. I took account of three free-text comments by parents. I spoke with staff during the inspection and also considered the views of six members of staff who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire.