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Mrs Jayne Humphrey
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Dear Mrs Humphrey

Short inspection of Portobello Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 9 May 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 February 2014.

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 successfully embedded a pleasant, welcoming ethos. Portobello Primary is a cheerful, inviting haven for pupils and families. The large majority of parents and carers would recommend the school to others. They describe it as an 'amazing', 'friendly' place where 'children are recognised as individuals' and are 'looked after and safe'. Staff have a genuine fondness and respect for pupils; they care deeply about pupils' welfare and happiness. Similarly, pupils admire staff, finding them 'fun' and 'encouraging'. They believe that teachers plan work that 'is exciting'. Polite, gracious interactions are indicative of the mutually respectful relationships that abound. This positive atmosphere means that pupils across key stages behave well and conduct themselves sensibly in and around the environment.

The previous inspection report challenged you to raise attainment in writing and improve the quality of teaching. You have been successful in tackling these recommendations. In both key stages 1 and 2, pupils' outcomes in writing have, over time, been sustained slightly above national averages. Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Consequently, pupils' outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics, overall, have improved. A higher proportion of pupils reached the expected standards in reading and mathematics in key stage 1 than was seen nationally in 2016 and 2017. In key stage 2, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in all subjects improved in 2017 to be broadly in line with the

national average.

You have maintained a consistent focus on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment despite some turbulence in staffing since the previous inspection. Leaders' support and challenge to staff is apt and well directed. You have ensured that regular, high-quality training is accurately based on adults' individual needs as well as the school's key areas for improvement. Leaders at all levels get into classes to examine the quality of teaching and learning taking place in subjects across the curriculum. Regular 'book looks' and honest, professional discussions about pupils' progress and outcomes are a regular feature of leaders' work with staff. Effective practices are celebrated and shared.

You are not, however, complacent. You have correctly identified that the teaching, learning and assessment of writing and mathematics in the early years require closer scrutiny. Some adults' expectations of what children can do and achieve are too low. Children in the early years do not have sufficient challenge in their writing or mathematical learning and tasks. Not all children, therefore, leave the early years fully prepared for the demands of the Year 1 curriculum.

You also recognise that whole-school improvement plans need sharpening. While focused on the correct priorities, it is not always clear, for example, what success might look like or precisely how it will be measured. Also, you have noticed that not all leaders, particularly those responsible for foundation subjects, track pupils' progress in a consistent manner. Some subject leaders are still learning their craft. They are developing the required skills and confidence needed to lead and manage their areas of the curriculum in the effective manner that you expect. Currently, some subject leaders' action plans are not specifically focused on improving teaching and raising pupils' outcomes. Together with governors, therefore, you are challenging as well as supporting leaders at all levels to hone their practice.

Safeguarding is effective.

The safety and welfare of pupils is at the heart of everything you do and you have ensured that the school's safeguarding arrangements are effective and fit for purpose. You engage the expertise and skills of external partners, such as social care, police, and health professionals, promptly where needed. You are also tenacious in following up any concerns or issues that arise, insisting that other agencies take appropriate, timely action. Records are detailed and well maintained. As a result, the most vulnerable families and pupils receive the correct care and support.

You have ensured that child protection is high on all adults' agendas. You make sure that all staff receive regular safeguarding training and are fully aware of their responsibilities in terms of protecting pupils and keeping them safe. Consequently, governors and staff speak confidently about their duties; they know how to spot potential signs of abuse and understand how, and to whom, they must report any concerns or issues.

Pupils feel safe. The large majority of parents agree that their children are well looked after and cared for. Staff enable pupils to understand how to keep themselves safe online and while using technology. Pupils are encouraged to ask questions and to share their views about the benefits and potential dangers of social media. As a result, pupils are informed and vigilant.

Inspection findings

- You have worked diligently to improve pupils' writing in accordance with the previous inspection's recommendation. Teaching staff receive regular training and professional development opportunities to heighten their understanding and skills of developing pupils as writers. Staff frequently moderate the quality of pupils' writing internally and with other schools. Pupils identified as falling behind are given prompt support. In key stages 1 and 2, in particular, pupils' work in their books demonstrates the success of your actions. In these key stages, pupils use increasingly interesting vocabulary and complex grammar in their written work as they progress from year to year. They like writing, understand its purpose and see themselves as authors.
- Some children in the early years, however, are insufficiently challenged in their written work and tasks. The expectations of some adults are too low. Children's poor letter formation, for example, is not always acted upon swiftly enough. Not all children have regular opportunities to write at length and some do not 'have a go' at writing often enough. Skills of stamina and fluency in writing therefore develop slowly in some children. Not all take pride in their writing or see themselves as writers. This means not all children make the rapid progress from their different starting points that adults should expect of them. In this regard, some children are not ready for the demands of writing in Year 1.
- While tackling pupils' writing skills, you correctly identified reading and phonics as areas worthy of development. You noticed that pupils' writing skills were getting out of kilter with their reading outcomes; pupils' outcomes in 2016 and again in 2017 suggested that they could write more proficiently than they could read. You therefore invested heavily in reading materials and the development of staff. Training in teaching phonics honed the skills of teaching staff. Consequently, books are now well-matched to pupils' needs and their phonetical awareness. Pupils across the school are full of praise for the new reading books you have purchased. These offer pupils a greater choice of texts and genres. Reading records show that the large majority of pupils now read regularly with adults in school. They love getting immersed in books and thoroughly appreciate having stories read to them by staff. As a result of your actions, current pupils' reading skills of decoding, fluency and comprehension have improved apace.
- Together with other leaders, you have also tackled the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics. You increased the quantity and quality of practical mathematical resources available to pupils. Staff are afforded good-quality professional-development opportunities. These have improved adults' skills and deepened their understanding of how best to teach core mathematical concepts and tackle pupils' misconceptions. Pupils, especially those in key stages 1 and 2, are now reasoning mathematically more confidently. They are more fluent in

their basic skills and can apply their thinking to increasingly complicated mathematical problems. Some children in the early years, however, have too little challenge in their mathematical learning. Adults do not fully understand the progress that children make or the extent of children's skills and understanding in mathematics. Tasks and provision therefore are sometimes not well matched to children's needs. This means not all children make strong progress from their broadly typical starting points.

- Subject leaders know their subjects well. They are proud to lead their areas of the curriculum and are offered regular opportunities to attend appropriate training. There exists a genuine desire among all leaders to inspire and excite pupils about the wider curriculum. Several pupils who spoke with me during the inspection were effusive in their praise for the art and physical education that they experience. Some subject leaders, though, are new to leadership and have yet to develop the depth of skill needed to markedly enhance the quality of teaching and learning in their areas. Improvement and action plans are not always focused sufficiently on pupils' outcomes or on improving specific aspects of teaching. In some subjects, pupils' progress is less effectively tracked than in others. You have correctly identified these aspects of subject leadership as areas for development. You also recognise that improvement and action plans lack sufficient detail or outcomes that can be easily measured.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- children in the early years have sufficient challenge in their writing and mathematical tasks and learning
- all adults have appropriately high expectations of what children in the early years can do and achieve
- all subject leaders are equipped with the skills, knowledge and understanding needed to bring about improvement in their areas of responsibility
- subject action plans and school improvement plans are detailed and have outcomes that can be easily measured.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Gateshead. 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 observed teaching, learning and assessment in all year groups with you. I scrutinised the work in pupils' books, spoke with some pupils from each key stage and listened to some pupils reading. No pupils responded to Ofsted's questionnaire. I reviewed school documentation and information, including policies, assessment information, monitoring files, subject leaders' action plans and your school improvement plans. I met with senior and subject leaders, governors, including the chair of the governing body, and a representative from the local authority. I talked with parents at the school gate and took account of the 56 free-text comments to Ofsted's survey and the 60 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. One member of staff responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire.