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Mrs Allyson Farrar
Headteacher
Dinnington First School
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Dear Mrs Farrar

Short inspection of Dinnington First School

Following my visit to the school on 3 October 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 October 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.**

You lead a team of dedicated and caring professionals who ensure that pupils are happy and feel safe in school. Governors talk passionately and with pride about the opportunities your school creates for pupils to perform to an audience and grow in confidence. Parents and carers value the school and appreciate the support you have given for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.

Your evaluation of the school is accurate and clearly identifies areas for improvement based on pupils' outcomes. You have correctly identified the need to review the curriculum to ensure that it meets the needs of all disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Detailed pupil tracking quickly identifies pupils who are falling behind to be targeted for additional support. Your pupil premium strategy identifies barriers to learning, such as emotional resilience, and how funding will be spent. However, an evaluation of spending for last year and a current plan were not available on the school website at the time of the inspection.

The previous inspection report challenged you to provide more opportunities for subject leaders to be as effective as they could be in improving the quality of teaching and learning. The deputy headteacher has recently taken the role of

subject leader for mathematics. He has a clear vision for the development of this subject in school.

The senior leadership team has correctly prioritised writing as an area for improvement. This is because pupils who achieve well in reading and mathematics have not always achieved the expected standard in this area. However, in 2018, improvements in the teaching of writing have had a positive impact and there was an increase in the proportion of Year 2 pupils achieving the expected standard. You recognise these improvements are not yet fully embedded or consistent throughout school. This remains an area for development.

The previous inspection report identified early years as a strength of the school. Parents appreciate transition arrangements and an early welcome meeting to ensure that their children quickly settle into full-time education. Your early years leader provides a bright and stimulating learning environment which is orderly and purposeful. Despite limitations imposed by ongoing building works, your children continue to access high-quality learning opportunities in the outside environment. You have identified the need to further accelerate progress in reading and writing in the early years and teachers are building further challenges for these areas of learning in activities this term.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and other leaders have ensured that the arrangements to keep pupils safe are effective and fit for purpose. You have conducted appropriate checks on the suitability of staff to work with children. Staff receive the training they need on child protection and safeguarding matters. Safeguarding records are maintained meticulously and you are tenacious in your pursuit of support and action to help vulnerable pupils and their families.

The pupils I met said children are well behaved in school and incidents of bullying, although infrequent, are always dealt with efficiently and effectively. The curriculum supports children to stay safe. For example, all pupils, including the youngest children, have a good understanding of internet safety. Pupils know why it is important not to share personal details online, the dangers of social media and why it is important to report concerns.

Pupils' good behaviour is a strength of the school. Pupils are polite and welcoming to visitors. There have been no exclusions reported in recent years.

Inspection findings

- I was interested to explore what leaders are doing to improve outcomes for all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, in writing. This has been a shared area of responsibility between yourself and the deputy headteacher, during the long-term absence of the English leader. The leadership of English has recently been identified by the local authority, as an area requiring support. While leaders have identified writing as an area for improvement, the school improvement plan is

lacking in detail and does not make it clear how this will be achieved.

- Work in pupils' books shows that standards in writing are high in a number of classes, but this is not consistent throughout school. In some classes, gaps in pupils' knowledge hinder progress. The presentation of pupils' work and the quality of handwriting are variable. School leaders have recently purchased a new handwriting scheme; however, this has yet to have a significant impact.
- Teachers do not consistently plan tasks which are appropriate to challenge higher-attaining pupils. Opportunities for pupils to achieve at a greater depth of understanding in writing are limited and not yet effective. In one class, pupils had frequent opportunities to apply their writing skills in other areas of the curriculum. For example, pupils wrote in detail about child labour in Victorian times. However, this practice is not embedded in other classes.
- In 2018, your school's assessment information shows that the proportion of Year 4 pupils who met or exceeded the age-related expectation in mathematics had fallen, when compared with the same cohort's outcomes at the end of key stage 1 in 2016.
- Your mathematics leader has identified mastery as an area for development and has recently delivered staff training. However, work in pupils' books shows a disproportionate focus on fluency and limited opportunities for pupils to develop and apply their reasoning and problem-solving skills. Teachers do not always use assessment, and their knowledge of the pupils, to pitch tasks appropriately to ensure that all groups of pupils make good progress.
- Finally, I focused on the early years to look at what leaders do to ensure that children get off to a flying start. Your assessment information shows that children begin Nursery with skills which are broadly typical for their stage of development. The proportion of children leaving Reception and achieving a good level of development remains broadly in line with the national average.
- We observed the children actively engaged in a wide range of meaningful activities. Clear adult direction prepared the children well to access the planned learning outcomes in both literacy- and numeracy-based activities. Adults observe learning and use their knowledge of the children to intervene effectively and in a timely manner to maximise learning. You have worked closely with your early years leader to increase the level of challenge and expectation in the Nursery and Reception classes to begin to accelerate progress.
- Adult-led small-group teaching develops children's phonic knowledge which they begin to apply in their writing. There are opportunities for independent writing throughout all areas of the early years classrooms. However, evidence in learning journals shows that children do not routinely choose to access these opportunities. Your early years leader is focused on the development of writing and is determined to improve children's writing skills.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers use assessment and their knowledge of the pupils to pitch tasks

appropriately to ensure that all groups, including the most able, are challenged effectively

- pupils develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills in mathematics so that achievement is raised
- letter formation and handwriting are taught systematically throughout school
- the school improvement plan is sharpened to include more specific actions and clearer impact measures.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and 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

Andy Jones
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I discussed the work of the school with you, your deputy headteacher and early years leader. You and I jointly conducted a learning walk in the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2. Together with your deputy headteacher, we completed a whole-school book scrutiny in English and mathematics. I had a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority and met three governors, including your chair of governors. I took into account school documentation, including monitoring records, self-evaluation and school improvement planning, assessment information, and policies and information posted on the school's website. I listened to pupils read and spoke with pupils from all key stages. I spoke with six parents and considered the 50 parent responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I spoke to staff during the inspection and considered the views of the one member of staff who completed the Ofsted online questionnaire.