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27 July 2017

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Dear Helen Stokoe

Short inspection of Stannington First School

Following my visit to the school on 12 July 2017, 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 2012.

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 established a warm, inviting ethos in this small school which sits at the heart of its community. You model high expectations effectively, and inspire staff to do their utmost to impact positively on the lives of pupils. Adults take great pride in knowing pupils as individuals; they consider carefully each pupil's particular needs and interests. Pupils thoroughly enjoy their time here; their good attendance is testament to this. The large majority of parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's survey or spoke to the lead inspector are confident that their children are happy, safe and well-looked after in your caring and capable hands.

You and governors have tackled the areas identified for improvement at the previous inspection, successfully. Together with staff, you made changes to the curriculum, making sure that pupils have more opportunities to practise and apply their writing skills across subjects. Good-quality staff training, workshops for parents and adjustments to the teaching and learning of phonics enable children in the early years to get off to a good start in their writing endeavours. Pupils use increasingly adventurous vocabulary as they move through the school and write for a wide variety of purposes. Work in lessons, on display and in pupils' books demonstrates that pupils in each key stage make good progress in writing. You have, however, noticed that some pupils do not use and apply increasingly complex spelling rules consistently, or sustain the quality of their work across subjects. You have quite rightly pinpointed aspects of spelling and presentation as areas for improvement.

In response to the previous inspection's recommendations, you put in place an assessment system that captures pupils' progress and attainment more accurately. It is also easier for staff and governors to use. Teachers now keep careful track of the progress that different groups of pupils make across subjects. They use assessment information to pitch work for pupils appropriately, supporting and challenging the large majority of pupils effectively. However, progress information about the most able pupils is less precise. You have accurately recognised the need to refine assessment systems further to capture and include better detail about this group's progress.

Children in the early years enter with skills and abilities that are typical for their age. Teaching and learning are good and improving, meaning that most children make good or better progress over time. Children use the stimulating range of resources sensibly, showing excellent skills of perseverance and resilience. They move safely and sensibly around a somewhat restricted area in terms of space. They get along well together, sharing and working collaboratively to manage tasks and challenges. There are smiles aplenty. Most children leave the early years with a good level of development. Year after year, higher proportions of children achieve the early learning goals in reading, writing and mathematics than averages seen nationally.

In 2016, by the end of key stage 1, pupils' attainment across subjects was well above national averages at the expected standard. Your assessment information shows that you have sustained this positive picture in 2017; pupils are again surpassing national averages across reading, writing and mathematics at both the expected and greater depths standards. Over time, pupils leave Year 4 with above expected achievements for their age in reading and writing. You are disappointed, however, with the proportion of pupils in key stage 2 currently reaching greater depths of learning and understanding in mathematics. You and staff are already on the case and are committed to raising pupils' outcomes in this area.

You have tendered your resignation as headteacher of the school with sadness, retiring after several years of service. Governors are appreciative of your work and the positive position in which you leave the school. Governors have valued the expertise and challenge presented by the local authority's school commissioner and improvement partners in planning for the school's future. Working closely with the local authority, governors have secured a new headteacher for September 2017. To accommodate growing numbers of pupils on roll, the building of a new classroom and library on site is well underway. Staff and governors feel well prepared for the changes in leadership and provision about to take place.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that the care and well-being of pupils is of central importance. You ensure that all staff and governors receive regular training so that they have the most recent guidance and information about child protection and safeguarding. Adults, therefore, understand how to keep pupils safe and free from harm. Staff

know what to do and who to contact if they have any concerns about pupils' welfare; they follow the procedures put in place to protect pupils diligently.

You and governors have conducted thorough risk-assessments and put strict safety measures in place to manage the current building works with due vigilance. You have maintained the site to a high standard throughout this construction work, therefore minimising risks and hazards for pupils. Playtimes and lunchtimes are well supervised by adults, meaning that pupils are looked after appropriately and any minor incidents can be dealt with swiftly. Entry and exit systems are suitably stringent.

Leaders and governors take their roles in the safe recruitment of staff and the protection of pupils seriously. Checks on the suitability of staff working with pupils are thorough and well maintained. Staff have positive, caring and respectful relationships with pupils; pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school and have someone who will listen if they have any worries. The large majority of parents agree.

Inspection findings

- Governors immerse themselves in the work of the school. They visit frequently and ask challenging questions. Governors have valued the support and constructive criticism offered by local authority partners. School improvement plans have sharpened as a result of effective partnership working, and leaders and governors are focusing on the right priorities.
- You have fully involved leaders at all levels in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning across subjects. Middle leaders meet with colleagues from other schools and external partners to share good practice, test their knowledge and develop their skills. They access high-quality professional development and training opportunities. Consequently, leadership and management capacity are developing apace.
- Teaching is good across key stages. Teaching staff are reflective about their practice. Staff welcome and value the challenge and support that leaders offer. There is a perceptible keenness to share good practice and a sincere commitment to self-improvement across the school community.
- Pupils demonstrate high levels of concentration and perseverance from the early years through to Year 4. The teaching of phonics has been particularly successful. Teaching staff enunciate letter sounds and names precisely, supporting and challenging pupils to do so too. Parents praised the phonics workshops that you made available to them, finding these helpful and informative. All pupils in Year 1 in 2016 achieved the expected standard in the national phonics screening check. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard this year remains well above the 2016 national average.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress across subjects. The coordinator has recently completed the national qualification for coordinating special educational needs, demonstrating her commitment to improving her own skills and knowledge in this area. She meets regularly with other leaders and endeavours to adopt the best practices in managing the needs

of this group. Arrangements for identifying and monitoring the progress of pupils have been refined. Staff have sharpened their skills in addressing and removing barriers to learning; they do not automatically record pupils showing slower progress and attainment as having special educational needs. The proportion of pupils deemed to require additional support has reduced significantly this year.

- You encourage staff to experiment and take risks in terms of enriching the curriculum. You responded swiftly to some issues you identified in boys' engagement and progress last year, challenging staff to make topics and materials more interesting. Boys are now making good progress across subjects. Their learning behaviours and attitudes are good, their confidence and aspirations high. Boys told the lead inspector that they thoroughly enjoy lots of exciting subjects at school; art, science and reading were particular favourites. Both girls and boys are excited and talk with animation about the new library that is currently being built.
- Several parents made comments to the lead inspector about the positive, enabling relationships that staff have with pupils. A large majority of parents in Ofsted's survey response said that communication between home and school is good. Parents reported that they find teaching staff approachable and professional. One parent expressed the views of many when discussing the progress that children make, saying that they 'come along [in] leaps and bounds, both academically and socially.' Although a very small number of parents felt that they would like further information about the progress that their child makes, the large majority of parents informed Ofsted that they receive frequent updates on their children's progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils are supported and challenged to apply increasingly demanding spelling rules consistently
- the presentation of pupils' work in books is of a high quality across subjects
- the progress of the most able pupils in each key stage is tracked more precisely
- higher proportions of pupils in key stage 2 reach greater depths of learning in mathematics.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northumberland. 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, a group of governors, including the chair and the vice-chair of the governing body, a representative from the local authority and middle leaders. I conducted observations of teaching and learning in all year groups jointly with you, and looked at pupils' work in books and during lessons. I examined a wide range of documentation, including policies, the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans as well as safeguarding information. I listened to pupils and children in the early years reading. I took account of 29 free-text messages from parents and 31 parental responses on Ofsted's Parent View. I also spoke with several parents at the start of the school day. I considered the views of 12 members of staff and one pupil who responded to Ofsted's surveys.