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Mrs Jackie Monte  
Newker Primary School  
Waldridge Road  
Chester le Street  
DH2 3AA

Dear Mrs Monte

### **Short inspection of Newker Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 8 December 2015, 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 September 2011.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You and your new leadership teams have taken effective action to re-energise the school and establish a shared ambition for Newker Primary School to become an 'outstanding community of learning where all achieve their true potential'. Pupils are confident and know that they are cared for and valued for who they are. The values of honesty, respect, courtesy and tolerance underpin relationships. Pupils increasingly develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes which should enable them to take their place as responsible, productive citizens in society.

Supported by your new deputy headteacher, you have rightly focused on developing classroom practice and sharing the best practice seen in the school more widely. As a result, teachers work hard to provide stimulating and active learning opportunities and are confident in setting challenges to stretch pupils' thinking. As a consequence, pupils enthuse about their learning and concentrate well in lessons.

Pupils behave well in and around the school, say bullying is rare and that they feel safe in school. They have a clear understanding of how to keep themselves safe online and can talk sensibly about different forms of bullying, including homophobic bullying. Pupils say some lessons are occasionally interrupted by 'silliness' but that this is rare.

The development of new and redefined leadership roles at all levels means that all staff and governors increasingly contribute to the accurate evaluation of the school and what it needs to do next to improve.

Parents are increasingly positive about the education provided and value your attempts to reach out and engage them more in the life of the school.

Documentation reviewed during the inspection, including letters to the inspector, confirms that the vast majority of parents who responded would recommend the school to other parents. Concern was raised by a minority of parents about the school's response to issues raised by them.

You and your leadership teams are committed to regularly reviewing how well pupils are doing and take prompt and effective actions to tackle gaps in learning. This ensures that pupils, whatever their starting points, make strong progress and that those who need to catch up do so quickly.

At the previous inspection, inspectors noted the outstanding outcomes for pupils supported by the good behaviour and challenge in lessons. The report also noted the cohesiveness of the leadership team and the accurate self-evaluation of how well the school was doing. In the interim, the school has seen some standards temporarily decline, especially in Key Stage 1, and there has been some turbulence in leadership arrangements. Governors have worked hard and been successful in stabilising this. In your role as deputy headteacher and now headteacher you have ensured that you have harnessed the strengths seen at the last inspection and where issues have arisen you have been quick to address them.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Senior leaders ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Safeguarding is frequently reviewed to ensure that processes are secure and practice is effective. Regular updates and frequent training keep staff well aware of what constitutes risk and provide new learning based on incidents elsewhere. The school works closely with other agencies to ensure that concerns are raised and dealt with promptly.

### **Inspection findings**

- The school has been through a period of peaks and troughs since the last inspection. Outcomes for pupils have not always been as strong as those seen in 2011 but have now, due to the actions of school leaders and teachers, largely recovered.
- Improvements in outcomes for early years have been secured. In 2013, outcomes were well below those seen nationally but a continuous rise means these now match those seen elsewhere.

- The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics screening check (letters and the sounds they represent) has increased and now exceeds the national average.
- Outcomes at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2014 were below those seen nationally in mathematics and writing. In 2015, the picture improved, and attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 was broadly average in all subjects.
- In the last two years, pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 was at least as high as the national average and was well above in reading.
- Disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as their counterparts in the early years and in the Year 1 phonics check. Where a gap persists at end of Key Stage 1, it is narrowing quickly. Disadvantaged pupils progress at the same rate as other pupils across Key Stage 2.
- Learning tasks are closely matched to pupils' differing starting points. Pupils' learning is effectively supported through helpful guidance from teachers on how to improve their work. As a result, pupils have a good understanding of their next steps to develop their knowledge and skills and take pride in their achievements.
- Pupils are articulate and enthusiastic about their learning and welcome the challenge to improve themselves further. For example, in one lesson a pupil felt he had quickly grasped the concept and was excited to apply and demonstrate this new learning immediately. The teacher responded well to his request and set a challenge to capture his enthusiasm.
- Pupils use a wide range of opportunities to write and to apply their mathematical skills and reasoning. The improving standard of writing is evident in pupils' work. The pride pupils take in their handwriting and presentation of work is notable.
- The impact of the wider leadership team has improved. You, your leaders and staff are committed to ensuring continuous improvement through developing classroom practice and focusing on pupils' learning. Leaders carefully monitor the quality of teaching and the work that the pupils are producing. As a result, they know how well pupils are doing and what needs to be done to improve teaching further. Leaders support and challenge staff effectively and hold them to account for the progress pupils make. Teachers work well together and support improvements in each other's practice.
- Checks on teaching and pupils' progress systematically identify where gaps in pupils' learning may be emerging. This results in additional support targeted to help individuals or groups of pupils to catch up where needed. For example, the cohort who had underachieved in writing and mathematics in Key Stage 1 in 2014 received additional support in Year 3 and have now caught up with where they should be.
- The governing body know the priorities for further improvement and hold senior leaders to account by checking progress against key actions in a timely manner. They have worked hard to maintain and stabilise leadership arrangements. Governors have responded positively to your fresh focus on leadership roles and have commissioned a review of their own effectiveness. School leaders at all levels provide reports to help governors to understand school developments and to form an increasingly accurate view of the school's overall effectiveness. They recognise that they have not secured enough information about what difference

additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is making and that the information provided to parents on how this funding is spent is not clear enough.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- school leaders establish a clearer picture about what difference funding for disadvantaged pupils is making and use this information to more effectively target actions to help all disadvantaged pupils achieve their full potential, especially by the end of Key Stage 1
- governors act on the findings of a recent review of governance to ensure that they sharpen their analytical skills and raise their level of challenge to school leaders.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Brown

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you, your senior leaders, and a group of governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. I visited several classrooms with you and your deputy headteacher to observe teaching and look at pupils' work. I spoke with some parents, pupils in lessons and a selected group of pupils to talk about the school. I reviewed information from Parent View, the online questionnaire for parents. I evaluated recent information about the progress that pupils make across the school and the how the accuracy of assessments is secured.