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Mrs Inez Burgess
Annfield Plain Junior School
Front Street
Annfield Plain
Stanley
County Durham
DH9 7ST

Dear Mrs Burgess

Short inspection of Annfield Plain Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 10 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 May 2012.

This school continues to be good.

You and your senior leadership team have sustained the good quality of education in the school and built on many of its strengths since the last inspection. You have nurtured positive relationships between staff and pupils based on a strong commitment to the 'rights of children', promoting positive behaviours to support learning and a strong commitment to developing citizenship. This reflects your vision that pupils need to be developed as rounded individuals able to contribute to society both locally and globally.

Pupils behave well in and around the school. They have a positive attitude to their learning and show consideration for each other in classrooms and at playtimes. Pupils move around the school in an orderly manner, settle quickly in lessons and respond well to the teacher's instructions. This is because pupils appreciate the impact their behaviour has on others and feel that positive behaviour is valued. The promotion of good attitudes and behaviours to support learning is widely understood, although pupils do not always remember to take turns and listen to each other during discussions.

Documentation reviewed during the inspection confirms that the vast majority of parents are confident in your leadership, feel well informed about the progress their child is making and consider that the behaviour of pupils is good. Information provided to parents on the school website is also of high quality and informative about how they can best help their child and keep them safe.

Your focus on improving the life chances for pupils in your school can be seen in the number of pupils achieving, and in some cases exceeding, expectations. In writing and mathematics all pupils, whatever their starting points, make expected progress, and many make better than expected progress. In reading, the vast majority make expected progress but fewer go on to make better than expected progress. Those from disadvantaged backgrounds make more rapid progress than others in the school and achieve as well as seen elsewhere. As a result, by the time they leave the school, pupils are well prepared for secondary school.

As a result of your effective leadership and the support of governors, the school has maintained the strengths that were noted at the last inspection. Your drive to ensure that the school continues to improve has ensured improvements to successfully address the areas identified for improvement by inspectors, most notably in the outcomes for pupils in writing. This has been achieved during a period of change to staffing in the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your senior team afford the highest priority to keeping pupils safe. Senior leaders ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and records are detailed and of high quality. You frequently review provision to ensure that best practice is maintained and processes are secure. Your drive to ensure that pupils are self-aware and involved includes work done by them to produce leaflets on keeping themselves safe, an audit of websites used by pupils at home, and advice and guidance to parents about how best to support their child.

Inspection findings

- Evidence seen during the inspection confirms the evaluation made by school leaders that this is a good school with some significant additional strengths. The unique characteristics and personality of the school reflect the ambition of the headteacher and senior leaders including the governors. Leaders' determination to 'open doors that would otherwise be shut' and provide the best possible chances for vulnerable pupils is reflected in the quality of relationships in the school and the positive outcomes being achieved by pupils.
- Consistently good teaching is raising attainment. You have addressed the areas identified for improvement at the last inspection so that writing now matches and surpasses the outcomes seen in reading and mathematics. Improving standards of writing are evident in pupils' work. In lessons, work is accurately matched to pupils' understanding and pupils have a good grasp of what to do next to improve their work. You continue to focus on securing additional information on starting points for pupils and identify any gaps in learning that may exist.

- Pupils make brisk progress across the school. Progress is especially strong in writing and mathematics. The rate of progress made by disadvantaged pupils has accelerated, especially in writing and mathematics. All those who needed to catch up have done so. The progress made by disadvantaged pupils and those vulnerable to underachievement is a forte of the school, and matches and often exceeds that seen by all pupils nationally.
- Improvements in reading have not kept pace with those seen in writing and mathematics, particularly for pupils who can be expected to make better progress. Those pupils who begin school with typical starting points are less likely to exceed expectations than can be seen in mathematics and writing.
- You and your senior leaders rightly ensure that the quality of classroom practice and the impact it has on pupils' progress is a focus for monitoring. You have ensured consistently good and sometimes better teaching through a period of significant changes in staff since the last inspection. This is because you have rigorous systems in place to make sure that new teachers are prepared effectively to meet school leaders' high expectations and apply policies consistently when they step into the classroom. In addition, you monitor, support and challenge staff, and hold them responsible for the progress pupils make.
- Feedback from the monitoring of teaching quality and the work seen in pupils' books informs individual teachers' training needs. Where the quality of teaching starts to fall below that seen in the rest of the school, you act to ensure that training and professional support helps teachers to quickly take effective action to improve their practice.
- Pupils are enthused by their work and find it challenging. They enjoy using and referring to 'magic' learning behaviours. For example, one pupil praised another for the 'gumption' they had shown in completing a difficult piece of work. These positive attitudes are evident in lessons and in discussion with pupils about their work.
- Pupils say they feel safe in school and staff listen to their concerns and anxieties. Bullying is rare and pupils talk eloquently about different forms of bullying and the impact it can have on individuals. For example, the school has acted directly in challenging online and homophobic bullying. Some pupils raised concerns about boisterous behaviour and pretend fighting at playtimes. This has subsequently been resolved. Some pupils also report that some silliness persists in classrooms but that this does not often interfere with their learning.
- Governors have a high level of commitment and passion for the school and the difference it makes to the lives of the pupils and the wider community. Their regular presence in the school and systems for checking on the progress the school is making ensure that they know the school well and understand the current priorities and how they will be addressed. They challenge you and your senior leaders to improve further. School leaders and governors, however, lack sufficient clarity about what will make a difference to help take the school to the next level, and what it will look like when they achieve this.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- they develop a sharper, more precise understanding of what is required to take the school to the next level so that governors and school leaders can better evaluate their own effectiveness
- the proportion of pupils who make better than expected progress in reading matches that seen in writing and 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 Durham local authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Brown
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy and a group of governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. I reviewed information from Parent View (the Ofsted's online survey) and other information held by the school about the views of parents. I evaluated recent information about the progress pupils make across the school, and looked in pupils' books to ascertain how the accuracy of assessment is established. I visited several classrooms with you to observe teaching. I spoke with a range of pupils in lessons and at playtimes, and a selected group of pupils about the school. I reviewed safeguarding arrangements in the school, including documentation, files and information on the school's website.