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Mrs Karen Schonau
Headteacher
Hillside Primary School
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ST2 7AS

Dear Mrs Schonau

Short inspection of Hillside Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 2 February 2016 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 January 2011.

This school continues to be good.

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

'The staff are approachable', and 'my children are happy here', were just some of the comments made by the parents I spoke with during the inspection. You, the assistant headteachers, teachers, teaching assistants and governors have successfully created an environment where pupils are encouraged to become self-assured and kind individuals.

Since the previous inspection you have taken effective action to strengthen communication with parents. The 'Hillside App' is particularly popular because it provides parents with instant information about pupils' achievements and school events. This, together with the regular school newsletter and text messaging service, keeps parents well informed about the school. A few parents have raised concerns with you about the school's approach to homework and the information they receive about their children's progress. In response to this you have ensured that at parent consultation meetings, parents are clear about their child's attainment and their next steps moving forward. You are in the process of reviewing the school's approach to homework.

One of the areas identified as in need of improvement at the previous inspection was the quality and effectiveness of teachers' marking. Pupils' work in different subjects

shows that staff adhere to the school's marking policy. Pupils take note of their teachers' comments and this helps them to improve their work.

The school has experienced significant changes in staffing. Only two of the teachers in post at the time of the previous inspection are still at the school. The governing body appointed you and two assistant headteachers in September 2014. Three new class teachers joined the school in September 2015. You and the assistant headteachers are taking appropriate action to further strengthen teaching and ensure that it is all of a consistently high quality.

Hillside Primary is due to become an academy in April 2016 and will join the City Learning Trust (CLT), a cooperative multi-academy trust. In preparation for this, you and other staff have already started to work with staff from other schools in the CLT. In December 2015, for instance, senior leaders worked with staff from three other CLT schools to review aspects of Hillside's work. You are taking appropriate action in response to the recommendations from this review.

Safeguarding is effective.

The arrangements for keeping pupils safe are effective. The school's business manager keeps records of all training attended by staff and arranges further training when required. She also ensures that all relevant checks are undertaken when new staff are appointed.

You and the governors make sure that all school policies in relation to keeping pupils safe are up to date. The designated safeguarding leaders ensure that concerns about pupils are followed up promptly and that all records are sufficiently detailed and stored securely.

The parents who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire, and the parents who spoke to me during the inspection, say that the school keeps their children safe. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They spoke confidently about the importance of using the internet carefully, taking care when crossing the road and reporting any concerns they may have to staff. Pupils told me, and school records confirm this, that incidents of bullying are rare and dealt with effectively.

Inspection findings

- You are a reflective and considerate leader who places the pupils' interests at the heart of everything you do. Parents describe you as a 'caring headteacher'. The two assistant headteachers support you well. Senior leaders and governors have a realistic view of the school's strengths and the aspects requiring further improvement.
- The training staff receive is helpful and strongly focused on helping pupils to reach even higher standards. You acknowledge and praise staff for

improvements in teaching and you also take decisive action if staff do not make the necessary improvements to their practice.

- Senior leaders keep a close check on the performance of teachers and teaching assistants. They also meet regularly with staff to discuss the performance of individual pupils and to identify and organise extra support for pupils who may not meet their learning targets. Senior leaders regularly observe teaching and review work in pupils' books. However, the advice that staff receive is not always precise enough. This is because the feedback that staff receive from senior leaders does not always focus enough on what the teachers need to do to help different groups of pupils make better progress.
- Members of the governing body have a broad range of skills and expertise. These are effectively utilised during meetings with school leaders. Governors provide a suitable level of challenge and support. They regularly attend training events in order to ensure that they remain up to date with the latest statutory requirements.
- Children in the Nursery and Reception classes are exceptionally well prepared for Year 1. The activities that teachers plan are interesting and imaginative. Children learn to use resources carefully, take turns, listen carefully and speak to each other and adults politely. In one instance, a group of children worked diligently to make sure that the 'pets' in the 'Hillside Vets Centre' were handled gently and prescribed the correct 'medication'. The most-able children are suitably challenged so that when they join Year 1 they have skills and knowledge that are above those typical for their age.
- In Years 1 to 6, pupils continue to develop highly positive attitudes to learning. They respond enthusiastically when asked to work on their own or in a group, they persevere when they are finding their work difficult, and they listen carefully to teachers and teaching assistants. Pupils have a good understanding of right and wrong and of the importance of treating others equally. School leaders have rightly recognised that pupils do not have a secure understanding of different religions and cultures. Their plans for improving this aspect of pupils' development are appropriate.
- Pupils thoroughly enjoy taking on responsibilities around the school. The 'play leaders', 'reading buddies' and 'friendship buddies', for example, are proud of the help they give to other pupils in the school. Pupils were particularly keen to talk to me about the 'luxury' features in the school playground. This included the 'agility' trail, which they said is fun to use.
- Pupils make good progress by the time they leave the school. The standards reached by most pupils in Year 6 are above those expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. Senior leaders have correctly identified that disadvantaged pupils do not always attain as well as their classmates in some year groups. In response to this, governors have appointed a teacher to provide additional support for disadvantaged pupils and to monitor their achievement. This teacher is having a positive

impact. Gaps in the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and their classmates are closing steadily.

- Senior leaders have also correctly identified that there are variations in the standards reached by boys and girls. In some year groups boys do not attain as well as girls and in others it is the reverse. Gaps between boys and girls are successfully closing because staff have made appropriate changes to the school curriculum. Staff select subject themes that interest both boys and girls. In Year 4, for example, pupils spoke enthusiastically about their 'Roman project'. They designed and made their own shields, wrote diary entries from the viewpoint of a soldier, and they visited a museum and dressed up as Roman soldiers.
- Teachers place a strong emphasis on ensuring that pupils spell correctly and use punctuation and grammar accurately when they write. They also successfully help pupils to learn how to add, subtract, divide and multiply with proficiency. In mathematics, teachers categorise questions according to complexity using the terms 'bronze', 'silver', 'gold' or 'platinum'. However, the questions that some staff set within these categories are too easy and they do not give pupils, particularly the most able, the chance to deepen their mathematical understanding.
- Disabled pupils and pupils who have special educational needs receive the additional support they need in reading, writing and mathematics. This helps them to make good progress in these areas of learning. There are, however, occasions in subjects other than English and mathematics when the activities they are asked to complete are too difficult and so they struggle to complete them without the help of an adult.
- Some teachers are particularly skilled in teaching subjects from the wider curriculum. They ensure that all pupils in their class make strong gains in their skills and knowledge in subjects such as history and geography. Pupils in Year 6 were very keen to talk about the Victorians. They told me that they enjoyed carrying out their own research, and investigating and learning from Victorian artefacts. However, not all teachers ensure that pupils acquire skills such as historical enquiry when they plan activities in different subjects.
- Pupils are proud of their school. They told me that the adults at Hillside take good care of them and they enjoy visiting different places because it helps to make their learning enjoyable.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- following visits to lessons and reviews of pupils' work, teachers receive the precise guidance they need to help different groups of pupils make better progress
- teachers plan activities that sufficiently challenge the most-able pupils, especially in mathematics

- when teachers plan activities in subjects other than English and mathematics, these activities enable pupils to develop a range of skills and that they provide a suitable level of challenge for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Stoke-on-Trent City Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Usha Devi
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection I met with you, the two assistant headteachers, two other leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and four other governors, and the Chief Executive Officer of CLT. I also spoke informally with pupils and parents. We made brief visits to lessons where we spoke to pupils about their work and looked at their books. I took account of the school's own questionnaires to parents, and 56 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View. I reviewed a range of documentation including the most recent information about pupils' achievement, minutes of governing body meetings, senior leaders' notes following visits to lessons and reviews of pupils' work, and records related to keeping pupils safe.