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23 June 2016

Ms J Walkden
Interim Headteacher
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Dear Ms Walkden

Short inspection of Northumberland Heath Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 10 May 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 inspection of its predecessor school.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. On your appointment as interim head teacher in September 2015, you immediately identified some shortcomings in the school's provision. You were particularly concerned about how well the behaviour policy was being implemented and about variations in the quality of teaching. You courageously set about addressing these weaknesses head-on. You accurately identified what needed to be improved and set about tackling it rapidly and firmly.

You have established a clear, comprehensible set of core values to guide the personal development of pupils. In doing so, you have been able to build upon the existing strengths of the school and ensure that learning is placed more firmly at the centre of the school's work. Senior leaders and governors adopt a direct and open approach when considering challenging issues. This helps to sustain the pace of school improvement.

A consistent, systematic approach to improving the quality of teaching is ensuring that that pupils benefit from more helpful, regular advice about how they can improve their work. You have established a professional culture of learning which enables less experienced teachers to improve their skills rapidly. This is enabling them to live up to the high expectations you have.

New recruits to the senior leadership team have strengthened your capacity to sustain improvements. You challenge one another as strongly as you challenge those you lead.

Areas for improvement have been well tackled. For example, improvements in the early years have ensured that children benefit from a much richer indoor and outdoor learning environment. You have provided effective training to ensure that teachers are able to make more accurate assessments of pupils' starting points. However, you recognise that the way teachers use this to plan lessons is a priority for further improvement.

You realised that the behaviour policy was not effective enough in its previous form. On your arrival it was necessary to introduce a more consistent, robust approach to tackling unacceptable behaviour from a small minority of pupils. You recognise the need to review the approach taken to improve pupils' behaviour as the skills of teachers in managing behaviour are enhanced and less-experienced teachers gain confidence. Better identification of pupils with special educational needs or disability is also supporting the improvement of pupils' behaviour.

Governors provide strong support and challenge, using effective questioning to delve deeper into key issues. They have the confidence to seek clarification when necessary. The local governing board works well in partnership with the board of trustees to maintain a strategic vision alongside strong local knowledge.

Safeguarding is effective.

Checks on the suitability of staff are carried out thoroughly and recorded in a systematic, complete manner. Child protection procedures are kept under regular review and backed up with detailed training. You have been careful to focus this on what you know to be a priority. For example, all staff have been trained in addressing any homophobic discrimination.

You demonstrate a willingness to learn lessons from your work and improve procedures when necessary. You pursue outcomes to referrals tenaciously and have the confidence to continue to monitor concerns even when external support is stepped down. You keep thorough records of all of your safeguarding work, which helps you to keep track of the impact of your work and change your approach if this appears to be necessary.

You have had to make difficult decisions at times when tackling unacceptable pupil behaviour. This has been considered carefully and with an eye to the safeguarding and rights of everyone in the school. Governors have been kept well informed about your decisions and have used this to help them support you and hold you closely to account.

Inspection findings

- Teachers use the checks they make on children's learning well to reshape the tasks they set up and the guidance they provide in the early years. This makes sure that children of all abilities, including the most able, make good progress from variable starting points and are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Disadvantaged pupils attained as well as other pupils nationally at the end of key stage 1 in 2015. The proportion of more-able pupils attaining the higher levels was well above the national average. Senior leaders picked up that variable attitudes to learning had affected the progress of pupils currently in Year 2 during the previous school year. Prompt and effective action has enabled pupils to increase their pace of learning and get back on track. As a result, the school's own information, supported by what the inspector could see in pupils' work, indicates that pupils are making good progress in the current school year.
- Senior leaders insist that the quality of teaching is maintained across the whole curriculum. When it was realised that the coverage of some subjects was inconsistent, prompt and effective action was taken to correct this.
- The progress pupils make is consistently good across year groups and subjects. You realised that the progress demonstrated by pupils' work needed to be at the heart of the professional judgements teachers make when assessing pupils' learning. You introduced more regular and thorough checks on the accuracy of teachers' assessments. The strengthening of the senior leadership team has provided further capacity to sustain this effective work in holding teachers closely to account for their impact on outcomes for pupils.
- Your checks on the quality of teaching are extensive and frequent. This has helped you to tackle individual development needs of teachers as well as providing training to improve the skills of all teachers. In the past year a number of newly qualified teachers have been appointed. The clear policies on teaching and the effective guidance provided by more experienced staff has enabled you to maintain the good standards of teaching through this time of transition. However, you realise that the tasks which teachers plan for pupils are sometimes not determined by really skilful use of assessment information. As a result, work set does not always match pupils' abilities closely enough.
- You have ensured that pupils' behaviour is improving. Since you took over as interim headteacher it has been necessary for you to take difficult decisions when tackling the most unacceptable behaviour. Your records indicate that it has been necessary to exclude some pupils. Pupils spoken to during the inspection appreciated the positive impact of the work of leaders to improve behaviour. However, you recognise that the process of developing pupils' resilience and ability to make the right choices is an ongoing process. Some parents remain unconvinced that behaviour has improved enough. Your plans

for improvement rightly continue to place a priority on eradicating any remaining concerns.

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- senior leaders build on the systems used to monitor and review the implementation of the behaviour policy so that instances of unacceptable pupil behaviour continue to decline rapidly
- teachers develop their skills further in using assessment information to plan work which closely matches the needs of pupils of all abilities.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the board of trustees and the director of education for the London borough of Bexley. This letter will also be published on Ofsted's website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Wright
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I held discussions with you, other senior leaders and the executive principal of the academy trust. I met with a group of teachers. I also had a meeting with representatives of the local board of governors and some of the trustees. This complemented a scrutiny of the written records of the work of governors. I conducted a tour of the school with the interim headteacher, looking at pupils' work and observing their learning. I observed pupils' behaviour during breaktimes and in the dining hall. I spoke to a group of pupils to discuss their views about the school. I also scrutinised a range of documents related to safeguarding, behaviour and school improvement. I considered the responses of parents to the online Parent View questionnaire alongside the school's own parent survey information.