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Matthew Ward
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Dear Mr Ward

Short inspection of Grange First School

Following my visit to the school on 6 December 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 November 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, the deputy headteacher and governors have an accurate understanding of the school's effectiveness. Your plans to improve the school further are focused sharply on improving pupils' outcomes. Leaders understand the need to challenge the most able pupils, and the most able disadvantaged pupils even more, especially in writing.

You have created a harmonious and safe environment for learning. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school. They appreciate being part of the 'Grange family', are happy to attend and eager to learn. Parents value highly teachers' efforts to keep them informed about their children's progress and new initiatives. They enjoy working with their children at the focused 'drop-ins' that you have implemented. As one parent reported, 'Grange is a nurturing, friendly and inclusive school at the heart of the community.'

Pupils are enthused by the engaging curriculum, the on-site forest school and the wide range of educational visits and visitors. They also appreciate the extensive range of extra-curricular activities, including sports, on offer. You are quite rightly impressed that every key stage 2 child represented the school in a sporting event last year. Pupils are extremely proud to wear the school's colours.

Governance is a strength of the school. Governors are highly skilled professionals who have high ambitions for the pupils, the staff and the school. Governors are

extremely knowledgeable about pupils' assessment information and understand trends over time. They identify accurately strengths and areas for further improvement, and provide a high level of challenge to you and other leaders. Governors do not challenge senior leaders effectively about trends in incidents of poor behaviour because they have not sought information about the number, types and regularity of incidents from senior leaders.

At the last inspection you were asked to focus on improving pupils' progress in phonics. You have ensured that the proportion of pupils who achieve the standard in the Year 1 check of phonics is above average year on year. Latterly, in 2016, you also ensured that every pupil achieved the phonics standard before they entered key stage 2.

You were also asked to improve the quality of teaching through providing pupils with more opportunities to think, talk and answer questions about their learning. We witnessed this first hand during the lessons that we observed together. Your pupils respond maturely to their teachers' expectations.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. You are tenacious in ensuring that vulnerable pupils are kept safe from harm through proactive work with a wide range of external agencies. You make sure that pupils receive the help and support that they deserve and to which they are entitled. Risk assessments, especially in relation to the extensive and ongoing building work, are thorough and appropriate. Pupils feel safe and well supported in school.

Governors take their duty of care very seriously. They attend safeguarding training regularly and test out the school's systems and procedures for themselves. For example, the safeguarding governor works with you to check the accuracy of the single central record of recruitment checks. These regular checks are recorded for posterity in the minutes of full governing body meetings.

Inspection findings

- The proportion of children who achieved a good level of development in the early years increased from 67% in 2015 to 80% in 2016; from average to well above average. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who achieved a good level of development increased from 43% to 57%. You have specific plans in place to improve the outcomes, especially in writing, for disadvantaged children in the early years.
- Leaders have taken effective action to improve the provision for mathematics in the early years. An external consultant helped staff to ensure that both the indoor and outdoor Nursery environments are alive with numbers. In Reception, all children now access daily teaching in mathematics as well as a wide range of stimulating mathematical activities in their play.
- Pupils make good progress in key stage 1. An above-average proportion reached

the expected standard and greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics in 2016. However, no disadvantaged pupils achieved greater depth in writing. Leaders have taken assertive action to address identified weaknesses in spelling and handwriting. For example, all learning support assistants have the improvement of pupils' handwriting as an appraisal target and all classrooms have spellings that children have to learn on display.

- Key stage 2 pupils make good progress to reach expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics. However, assessment information and pupils' workbooks show that not enough of the most able disadvantaged pupils reach the higher standard. Subject leaders for English and mathematics acknowledge that the most able pupils and the most able disadvantaged pupils do not achieve the standards of which they are capable. Improving this aspect of the school's work is a key whole-school target.
- The provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is good. Teachers work actively and in partnership with parents to identify and overcome the difficulties that pupils face. Learning support assistants are highly skilled in delivering closely targeted intervention activities which meet pupils' individual needs. Parents feel well informed about all aspects of the provision for their children. They appreciated and benefited from the 'intervention drop-in'. Their knowledge and understanding increased through completing intervention activities with their children.
- Reading is a strength in the school. Pupils learn good early reading skills in the early years. They use their phonic knowledge well to read unknown words in key stage 1. They acquire good habits and develop a joy of reading in key stage 2. Parents support their children by reading with them at home. Pupils like earning stamps on their bronze, silver, gold and platinum 'radical reading challenge' bookmarks. Parents appreciate seeing their children's photographs and reading certificates online.
- Pupils' attendance, especially the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, is much improved as a result of a range of successful initiatives. For example, the school's attendance support officer engages very effectively with parents. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils currently stands at 97.1%. This compares most favourably with 94.6% at the same point in time last year. Similarly, the attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is currently 96.7% compared to 95.5% at the same point in time last year.
- Pupils' behaviour is a strength. Pupils told me that there are occasional instances of poor behaviour and very rare instances of bullying. They are adamant that all incidents are dealt with immediately and appropriately by the adults in school. However, although recorded correctly, the small number and types of incident are not reported to governors. This means that the governing body is unable to challenge senior leaders effectively about any behavioural trends.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers, in all key stages, plan work which challenges the most able pupils and

the most able disadvantaged pupils to reach the highest standards, especially in writing

- the number and type of behavioural incidents are reported to governors to enable them to carry out their support and challenge role even more effectively.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Newcastle-upon-Tyne. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Belita Scott
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I focused on the following key lines of enquiry during the inspection:

- Is safeguarding effective?
- Do children, especially disadvantaged children, make good progress from their starting points in the early years?
- Are pupils making good progress in phonics?
- Are leaders taking effective action to ensure that pupils' attainment and progress in writing in key stage 1 is as good as it is in reading and mathematics?
- Have leaders addressed the high rates of absence for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities?
- Is attainment and progress good or better in Years 3 and 4?

I discussed the work of the school with you, the leader of the early years, subject leaders and four governors, including the vice-chair of the governing body. I checked a range of documentation, including leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness. I examined information about pupils' achievement and minutes of meetings of the governing body. I considered 66 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) and talked to parents as they collected their children. I visited classes to observe teaching, learning and assessment, alongside you. I checked the progress made by pupils in their workbooks, talked formally to a group of six pupils and talked more informally to pupils in lessons about their learning. I listened to pupils read from Years 1, 3 and 4.