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Mrs Heather Ware
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Dear Mrs Ware

Short inspection of Great Ellingham Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 24 November 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 April 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Great Ellingham Primary School is rightly recognised by parents and pupils as a place where all are welcome and a harmonious atmosphere prevails throughout.

You have ensured that developing well-rounded pupils remains central to the work of the school. Your assemblies provide opportunities for celebrating academic achievements, such as those of pupils who have learned their number bonds, and recognising those pupils who have shown good social skills, for example by helping others in the playground. Pupils told me that at school they not only learn different subjects but also 'life skills' that will help them in the wider world.

Your programme to develop pupils' learning attitudes through superhero characters has had a positive impact. Pupils talk confidently about needing to show perseverance like one of these characters, and to demonstrate resilience when they find work tricky.

You are very well supported by the deputy headteacher because you have complementary skills. You share responsibility for checking the quality of teaching by visiting classes often, both formally and informally. This means that you are equally knowledgeable about the strengths and areas where improvements are

needed, and your evaluation of the school is accurate. You draw on information from these visits and checks on pupils' work, in addition to looking closely at information about pupils' progress and surveying the views of pupils and parents. As a result, you quickly identify the reasons for any weaknesses in pupils' achievements and address these effectively.

Governors provide strong support for you and your team. They have sought training from the local authority to further develop their understanding of their roles and, as a result, balance support and challenge well. They value and respect your expertise, but also question the rationale for decisions, for example about expenditure of funding for disadvantaged pupils.

Governors use their particular expertise well. One governor who is a teacher has taken a lead on working with the deputy headteacher in implementing changes in mathematics; another takes a lead on matters relating to personnel because her expertise lies in this field. Consequently, the governing body is effective in supporting, and holding to account, you and the staff.

Pupils are excellent ambassadors for the school. They are articulate in explaining why they feel the school is a special place where 'everyone helps each other, not just the adults, but we all help each other too'. One pupil said with pride, 'we are all different but all one family'. They told me about all the many aspects of school that they enjoy, including interesting lessons when they made films, and extra-curricular clubs provided. They said that adults help them when they find work tricky and there is always someone to talk to when they need to.

Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school, with the vast majority rarely misbehaving as demonstrated by the school's behaviour records. Those pupils who have difficulties with their behaviour are very well managed and rarely disrupt learning. The strong support provided ensures that they are included within the school seamlessly.

Children in the Reception class enjoy a very well-organised and carefully planned curriculum. Despite its limited space, the learning environment is welcoming and attractive. Children enjoy using their role play area, currently a shop, and there are a good range of learning activities provided. During the inspection, a range of quality literacy-based activities were evident, which children happily took part in. Additional adults support learning well. In an example of good support, while pupils took part in a task with the teacher, another adult carefully recorded children's responses to questions so that this could be used to assess their progress. Parents said that their children had settled very quickly into school because the adults had been very welcoming and good systems are in place for transition for those who attend nursery.

The curriculum is broad and interesting. Teachers think carefully about how they can make learning interesting and fun. In Year 2, pupils were learning about Amy Johnson. The teacher role played the character and pupils enjoyed asking her questions, entering into the spirit of the pretence well. Subjects such as art are

taught well. Pupils spent a day exploring the work of less well-known artists and produced some high-quality work in similar styles to the artists.

Improving science was identified as an area for improvement at the previous inspection. Pupils, particularly in the older classes, now make good progress in science because they have good opportunities to engage in investigations, such as the best materials to use to make a drum, and to explore concepts such as fair testing. These opportunities ensure that learning is stimulating and that pupils enjoy learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

All statutory requirements for keeping pupils safe are met. You ensure that all staff know what is required of them. Checks on staff working at the school are carried out swiftly and recorded appropriately. Records of concerns about pupils are maintained very well, with concerns followed up rigorously and all actions taken recorded accurately. Staff training is up to date and time is regularly allocated for this. The forms that record concerns show that staff know what signs to look out for that may indicate concerns about a child. Staff are confident that action will be taken if they raise a concern about a child.

Inspection findings

- The previous inspection identified the need to improve pupils' reading. Since then, you have ensured that reading has a high profile across the school. Pupils spoke about their 'class books', which teachers read with pupils and which stimulate an appetite for reading. Guided reading is also well used to develop pupils' understanding and comprehension skills, and is particularly effective in ensuring that the most able readers develop more sophisticated reading skills.
- You have changed how phonics is taught so that it is more consistent across classes. During the inspection, children in the Reception class were taking part in a phonics activity with the teacher. The children demonstrated good knowledge of sounds and the ability to identify individual sounds within words. A good range of phonics tasks were then provided both indoors and outdoors for children to do independently and with adult support.
- You recognise that the proportion of pupils who passed the Year 1 phonics check in 2016, while improving, was below national averages. You demonstrated to me through the pupils' assessments that standards are set to rise this year as the better systems for teaching phonics take effect. This was also evidenced, for example, by those pupils in Year 1 who I heard read. The pupils, identified as being at the early stages of reading and needing additional support, are secure in knowing their initial sounds and reading simple words, and are being helped to develop their skills in blending sounds to read more tricky words.
- Pupils make good progress in writing. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 show skill, flair and an obvious enthusiasm for writing. They are provided with plentiful opportunities

to develop their skills, for example by writing about making lanterns, to write in topic work drawing on research they have carried out and to write about scientific investigations. However, in some classes, pupils do not practise their writing skills as often as they should and this slows their progress.

- In 2016, pupils' outcomes in Year 2 dipped significantly because this group of pupils included a large proportion of pupils with significant additional needs, some of whom have now moved into specialist provision. You had predicted this dip in standards and discussed the likely outcomes fully with your governors.
- The work of pupils currently in Year 2 demonstrates that pupils are making good progress in English and mathematics, because teachers use assessment appropriately to plan work which meets pupils' needs. As a result, you are confident that this year the proportion of pupils in Year 2 who meet the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics will exceed national averages.
- Pupils who are disadvantaged make good progress throughout the school. You and your staff consider carefully the needs of each pupil and their individual barriers to learning, and plan accordingly. This includes providing support for the most able disadvantaged pupils so that their progress is accelerated. You take account of disadvantaged pupils' academic needs, providing additional teaching support, and also their emotional needs. You provide support through the school's behavioural support assistant for those pupils who have difficulties with their behaviour.
- Support is provided for parents because you know that helping families to be settled and secure has a positive impact on pupils and their learning. You have planned a specific project to develop pupils' self-esteem through developing the school grounds, because you have identified this as an area which will help specific pupils.
- You have a number of pupils who are looked after, and you and other leaders plan extremely carefully to ensure that their needs are well met. You set up good procedures for communicating with their carers and make sure that they have someone they feel confident to speak with if they have a concern. As a result, the pupils are making good progress.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. Their needs are identified by teachers and leaders and the plans put in place to support them are well matched to their needs. Leaders check that additional support is effective. They also check that the support provided by teachers in classes is helping the pupils to move on in their learning. You know that, in the past, the attendance of pupils who have special educational needs was lower overall than others in school because a small proportion had particular needs which impacted on their attendance at school. Inspection evidence shows that, currently, the majority of the pupils have good attendance.
- Outcomes in mathematics at the end of key stage 2 have been lower than in reading and writing. You rightly identified this as a concern and assigned the deputy headteacher to lead improvements in this area. She has put in place

training for teachers in new approaches to teaching mathematics, with a greater focus on problem-solving and reasoning. This is having a positive impact as shown in pupils' work. Pupils are confident in tackling problems and have strategies for doing so. Pupils can select different levels of challenge, which is providing the most able pupils with greater challenge. This approach also encourages other pupils to work towards moving on to the next challenge when they are confident in doing so and consequently is extending their learning.

- Pupils are given the opportunity to assess their own learning. This works well to check if they found the work difficult, about right or quite easy. Teachers use this information well when planning their next lessons.
- Leaders have ensured that at key stage 1 pupils learn in a variety of ways, for example using practical resources and then completing tasks using their own visual representations. Pupils were drawing pictures to help them work out multiplication problems. This is helping pupils to gain a secure understanding of mathematical concepts. You have provided support for parents in how to help their children with mathematics through workshops and presentations. As a result, progress in mathematics is improving.
- You have established better systems for subject leadership across the federated schools, so that teachers take responsibility for a subject in both schools. This is helping staff to develop their professional expertise. However, not all leaders are yet equally knowledgeable about standards of teaching and learning in both schools because they have not spent enough time in both schools. Some do not know well enough what needs to be done to secure further improvements.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the interesting opportunities for learning provided by the broad curriculum are better used to develop pupils' writing skills
- all subject leaders are equally knowledgeable about standards of teaching and learning in both schools so that they plan strategically for improvement
- the improvements made to the teaching of phonics in key stage 1 and of mathematics across the school are further embedded so that standards rise to above national averages.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the director of children's services for Norfolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Maria Curry
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and the deputy headteacher. I met with five governors and with a small number of pupils from Years 4, 5 and 6. I heard a sample of pupils read. I met with some subject leaders and I scrutinised a range of documents, including information on pupils' progress, arrangements for safeguarding children, development planning and the school's self-evaluation. I visited all classes and evaluated pupils' work. I evaluated the school's website and found it to meet requirements on the publication of specified information.

I focused particularly on how the teaching of reading had improved, the progress of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and the progress pupils are making in mathematics.