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Mrs Dawn Dunn
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Dunn

Short inspection of Hesleden Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 15 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 October 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained and improved upon the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have successfully strengthened the quality of teaching and improved the progress pupils make, by accurately identifying where improvements were most needed. You have provided good training and development opportunities for your staff, which have helped them to improve their practice. As a result, pupils with different starting points are taught consistently well.

Pupils feel secure and happy. Their good attendance, which is better than that seen nationally, indicates that they enjoy coming to school. They behave well and show consistently good manners and respect for one another. Your teachers expect the best and, as a result, most pupils work hard and take care to present their work to the best of their ability.

In the previous inspection report leaders were challenged to do more to raise the attainment of the most able pupils. Since then you have successfully raised standards in the early years and in key stage 1, where pupils' reading skills have improved steadily over time. At key stage 2 leaders have also successfully improved standards. In 2016 the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was well above the national average. Your most-able pupils are making strong and sustained progress across a broad range of subjects and an increasing proportion of them are attaining high standards, particularly in writing.

You and the governors have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have good plans in place to move the school further forward. Leadership responsibilities are widely shared across the staff, who feel empowered and determined to tackle any identified weaknesses. All members of staff support one another well and are keen to share the best practice in the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Parents, pupils and members of staff agree that safety is a high priority at Hesleden Primary School. The curriculum includes many thoughtful topics designed to ensure that pupils are well informed about possible risks. Consequently, pupils know how to stay safe and know what to do if they have any concerns.

You and the governors regularly review policies and procedures for keeping pupils safe and you ensure that they are well understood by adults that work in the school. Leaders act quickly to safeguard children when they have concerns. They take advice readily from external agencies and are dogged in their determination to resolve concerns. Leaders ensure that a culture of vigilance is maintained and that all members of staff receive regular training.

Inspection findings

- You and your staff hold high expectations and are ambitious for your pupils. Together you have remodelled what you teach to reflect the increased demands of the national curriculum. You have implemented an assessment system which enables you to track each pupil's progress effectively. Assessment information has begun to be used more consistently by teachers to inform their planning, although there is more to do to ensure that the differing needs of pupils are consistently well met.
- The work of governors has improved since the last inspection. Governors have made a significant contribution to establishing the vision and values of the school. They are increasingly skilful 'critical friends'. They meet regularly with different members of staff and listen carefully to the views of pupils. They have good procedures in place to analyse tracking information and ask probing questions if they identify any concerns. Consequently, they have a deep understanding of the school's work and know where to target their support and challenge.
- The quality of pupils' writing has improved and is a strength of the school. Teachers provide exciting and varied writing assignments that promote accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar and a high degree of creativity. Pupils' writing books show that they are making rapid progress because they enjoy the topics covered and benefit from their teacher's pertinent feedback. Pleasingly, pupils apply their writing skills to a consistently high standard in other subjects such as history, geography and science.
- Children make rapid progress in the Nursery and Reception classes because of the rich variety of resources and sharply focused teaching. For example, children quickly acquire skills in language and communication because they are skilfully taught the sounds letters make and are keen to write about their experiences. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics screening

check has risen steadily over the last three years and is well above the national figure. Pupils make consistently good progress across Years 1 and 2 so that standards are above the national average by the end of the key stage.

- Last year, pupils made good progress in writing and mathematics across key stage 2. Outcomes in reading, spelling, punctuation and grammar were not quite as strong and both areas are now central to your improvement plans. The work in books of pupils currently in the school shows that most teachers are responding well and expected more of pupils. There is some good emerging practice in upper key stage 2, for example, which needs to be shared more widely. Your most recent assessments confirm that all pupils, including the disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are now making more consistent progress across different subjects and key stages.
- Pupils read well and show a keen interest in both fiction and non-fiction texts. They enjoy books and laugh out loud at humorous stories. Many pupils wanted to read to me during the visit, reflecting their confidence and the pleasure they take in reading.
- Your pupils are very courteous and polite. They told me that this is important and that teachers all encourage and reward good manners when they see them. Pupils move calmly and cheerfully around the school and enjoy playing together and utilising the play equipment outside at social times. In lessons, most pupils show determination, although a few lack the commitment and self-confidence to keep trying when the work provided for them gets more challenging.
- Members of staff responsible for leading different subjects benefit from the good links they have with other schools, a local teaching school alliance and the mathematics hub. Staff are able to see where the school's provision can be improved and provide good support and guidance to their colleagues. Some innovative approaches, such as digitally recording lessons and sharing aspects of effective practice at staff meetings, are strengthening an already effective culture of teamwork.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- work to raise standards further in reading, spelling, punctuation and grammar is carefully checked and best practice is shared
- all teachers make consistently effective use of assessment information, so that their lesson planning meets the needs of pupils with differing starting points equally well
- teachers work together to promote pupils' independence, self-motivation and resilience, so that they keep trying when faced with challenging work.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I pursued the following lines of enquiry:

- Are pupils currently in the school making good progress across a range of subjects and key stages?
- Are the most-able pupils challenged sufficiently and do they achieve their potential?
- Is the quality of teaching, learning and assessment good enough in key stage 2?
- How well are leaders and governors checking and evaluating the work of the school?
- Are child protection and safeguarding arrangements robust and does a culture of vigilance exist across all members of staff?

During the inspection, I met with you, all of the teachers and a group of governors, including the new and former chair of the governing body. I listened to pupils read and spoke with them formally and informally during breaktimes and in lessons. I spoke to a representative of the local authority by telephone. You and I jointly observed teaching in most classes. I scrutinised safeguarding policies and practice and reviewed case studies of vulnerable pupils. I also considered other school information and documentation, including the school's improvement plans and self-evaluation statements. I examined policies and information posted on the school website. I scrutinised in detail the work in books of some disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils. I also took the views of parents, pupils and staff into account from their responses to questionnaires.