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Mrs Catherine Lee
Headteacher
Pittington Primary School
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Dear Mrs Lee

Short inspection of Pittington Primary 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 your school was judged to be good in September 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 have established a culture of high expectations and a shared commitment to ongoing improvement. You have strengthened senior leadership and given subject leaders increasing responsibility for the quality of teaching. As a result, teachers monitor progress and performance more rigorously. Staffing is stable but never complacent and there is wide involvement in professional development activities and networking meetings to strengthen expertise and improve provision for pupils. As a result of strong leadership, rigorous systems and effective teaching, pupils achieve high standards and make good and improving progress.

School leaders demonstrate a commitment to the wider personal development of pupils that permeates all aspects of the school's work. The broad and balanced curriculum is enriched by experiences that enable pupils to explore topics and issues in greater depth. Each class takes part in a learning journey, chronicled in class folders, which provides an insight into the religious, cultural and sporting experiences that enrich their learning. Dance festivals, outdoor pursuits, self-defence lessons and religious festivals are a small selection of the diverse experiences that stimulate interest and enable pupils to develop wider personal and social skills.

Leaders engender a culture of mutual respect where pupils are willing to talk and share their views, as they know that their opinions will be valued. Leaders are proud of their inclusive community, which has received quality marks for both inclusion and achievement for all.

Middle leaders are entrusted with clear responsibilities for checking the quality of work across the school and for sharing good practice. All teachers review pupils' progress on a termly basis and have a strong idea of the school's key priorities. Leaders invite external partners from neighbouring schools and the local authority to review aspects of their work and this lends additional accuracy to their self-evaluation. This effective balance of close monitoring and continuing professional development supports pupils in achieving strong outcomes and improving rates of progress.

Governors are committed to the success of the school and work closely with senior leaders to secure ongoing improvement. Each governor is attached to a class and this provides them with a detailed insight into pupils' progress. They review teacher performance and pay progression closely, and have the skills and tenacity to hold leaders to account. Governors effectively monitor school finances and have established plans for long-term security and short-term improvements. They check the impact of additional funding, such as the targeted use of the pupil premium funding. They have a particular pride in their effective use of the physical education and sport premium funding, which has supported extremely high participation in a diverse range of sporting competitions.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders are extremely mindful of pupils' welfare and safety and take their safeguarding responsibilities very seriously. Rigorous checks are made on the suitability of adults working at the school. Staff and governors receive up-to-date training on key safeguarding issues and the headteacher provides training to others on aspects of safeguarding. Any concerns over pupils' welfare are pursued thoroughly. The headteacher recently carried out an audit of safeguarding procedures that further confirmed the thoroughness of school procedures. Pupils feel safe and their parents agree. Pupils were able to discuss the actions they could take to remain safe, for example the actions needed to stay safe online.

Inspection findings

- Your dedication to continuing improvement across phases has led to a climate where teaching is consistently good. Teachers target their teaching, learning and assessment to meet pupils' needs.
- Over time, pupils achieve levels of attainment that are above those seen nationally. Pupils make impressive progress in writing and mathematics, although their progress in reading is not as strong.
- Leaders have addressed many of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Pupils are now beginning to build more purposefully upon the high standards achieved in the early years. Key stage 1 outcomes in 2015 and 2016

were above those seen nationally.

- Teachers track pupils' progress through a series of termly assessments and carry out moderation with other schools and local authority advisers to help them check the accuracy of assessment. However, termly reviews of pupils' progress do not consistently prompt timely interventions for all year groups.
- As a result of imaginative planning, effective teaching and the creative use of resources, children in the early years make extremely strong progress and achieve levels of development well above those seen nationally. In Nursery, children developed rhythm and counting skills by counting beats on percussion instruments while in Reception, children were keen to scribe their thoughts in emerging stories.
- Teachers use effective strategies to develop pupils' reading skills in the early years and at key stages 1 and 2. Outcomes in the phonics screening check are consistently above those achieved nationally and the school has shared its good practice with other schools locally. The least able pupils use their knowledge of phonics to pronounce unfamiliar words, and the most able read with fluency and expression.
- Pupils' skills in reading for understanding are less well developed. While leaders are developing pupils' vocabulary and their capacity to summarise and infer, pupils' progress in this area has been weaker over time. In 2016, the most able pupils made less progress in reading than in writing and mathematics.
- Pupils develop strong writing skills. They have a good understanding of grammatical features and how to use them to suit the stylistic requirements of particular types of writing. Pupils were seen confidently considering the key features that would contribute to an effective piece of persuasive writing. They demonstrated pride in their writing and were comfortable writing at length.
- Pupils are making strong progress in mathematics and show confidence in their arithmetic skills and in deploying a range of computational methods. Work in books shows that pupils make good progress over time and respond to teachers' feedback to deepen their understanding. In 2016, pupils made good progress, although boys made much stronger progress than girls. Leaders are working further on reasoning skills to accelerate the proportion of pupils working at greater depth.
- Work in topic books reflected good progress in science and history, with pupils encouraged to write at length when pursuing topics. Science books showed that pupils had access to intriguing experiments, although the work in books did not always enable them to develop their ideas in depth.
- Teachers provide high-quality written and verbal feedback in line with the school's policy and this supports pupils in making good progress.
- Pupils are extremely well behaved and demonstrate high levels of courtesy towards one another and adults. They routinely hold doors open for others and support other pupils at lunchtime through their buddy system. They conduct themselves in a friendly and orderly manner on corridors and around the site. Relationships are strong as pupils know that teachers have their interests at heart. Pupils are positive learners, sharing and discussing their work with one

another and focusing attentively when required.

- Rates of attendance are high as pupils value their learning and find the school a warm and welcoming place. Leaders encourage high rates of attendance for all pupils and communicate this message clearly to all parents.
- Leaders are aware of the needs of disadvantaged pupils and increasingly target interventions on specific support to raise achievement in the classroom. As a result, differences have diminished in a number of areas, with disadvantaged pupils performing better than others in reading and writing but making slightly less progress in mathematics and science.
- Leaders have a close understanding of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and target interventions to support their progress. Initiatives such as the nurture club have built skills and social confidence and the school has received external acclaim for its inclusive approach to learning. Parents value the support their children receive. As a result, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities made improving progress in 2016.
- Teachers are providing additional challenge for the most able and this contributes towards their extremely strong progress in writing and good progress in mathematics in 2016. However, pupils do not feel consistently challenged and this was reflected in the slower progress made by the most able in reading and the less rigorous challenge evident in science books. However, teachers are building increasing challenge into their choices of texts and classroom tasks and these are beginning to contribute to more widespread progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' progress in reading is accelerated through a stronger focus on summarising, inference and the effect of vocabulary choice
- the strong and improving progress in writing and mathematics is matched across a wide range of subjects, including science, particularly for the most able
- regular tracking of progress is carried out in a timely manner to inform teaching and intervention activities.

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

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Kirtley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

As part of the inspection, I explored the effectiveness of leadership and management and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. I looked at the progress of key groups, including disadvantaged pupils, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and the most able pupils. I also investigated the progress of boys and girls and explored the progress pupils were making in reading.

During the inspection, I met with you, senior leaders and middle leaders. I also spoke to the full governing body. I held a meeting with a group of pupils and talked to pupils less formally in lessons. I also talked to the school improvement partner from the local authority. I undertook learning walks with you and carried out my own additional observations. I also looked at pupils' work in books and folders. I examined the school improvement plan as well as other documents, including the school's self-evaluation, assessment information, behaviour and attendance information and pupil tracking. I examined safeguarding documents, including the single central record. I took into account 61 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire, 36 free-text responses, 19 responses to the staff questionnaire and 32 responses to the pupil questionnaire.