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Mr Simon Brown
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Brown

Short inspection of Blaydon West Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 18 January 2017, 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 July 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Since you joined the school in September 2015, you have established a strong leadership and teaching team who share your determination to rapidly improve the school. You know the school's strengths and weaknesses well and have relentlessly tackled underperformance. This has resulted in improved outcomes for pupils at the end of key stages 1 and 2 in 2016 in reading, writing and mathematics.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and they enjoy their learning, particularly in mathematics and reading. They appreciate the work that their teachers do to make learning fun and take pride in their successes. The overwhelming majority of parents and carers are delighted with the quality of education their children receive. Parents and carers value your efforts to involve them in day-to-day school life through the recently introduced technology which has enabled you to send over 8,000 communications about pupils' learning experiences to families in the last school term. Your recently refreshed school website offers easy access to the information and documents which parents may need.

Despite some fluctuation in pupils' attainment and progress since the previous inspection and significant changes to leadership and staffing, pupils are now achieving consistently well across the school. Your work to improve the teaching of writing has enabled more pupils to reach higher levels of attainment and a higher

than average proportion of pupils reached and exceeded the nationally expected standard in English grammar, punctuation and spelling at the end of Year 6 in 2016.

You have introduced new systems to help teachers check what pupils can do and to use this information to plan for their next steps. This has ensured that you and your staff know every pupil extremely well and has enabled you to provide carefully chosen support to help pupils to make more rapid progress. This is particularly evident in the teaching of phonics, where pupils' attainment at the end of Year 1 has improved from below average in 2014 to above average in 2016 and disadvantaged pupils now achieve in line with non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

You are driven to ensure that your pupils will have nothing but the best and have comprehensive plans in place to secure further improvement in the school. While these are focused on the correct priorities, the targets you set are not always precise enough to enable governors to keep a regular check on the progress you are making.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your leadership team have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All staff receive frequent training and guidance so they know how to keep pupils safe. You are meticulous in checking the suitability of adults, including volunteers, to work with children. You engage effectively with different agencies to secure the right support for vulnerable children and families. You have been proactive in developing the role of a family support worker to provide early help to children and their families. This has contributed to an improvement in the attendance of pupils overall and a reduction in the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school. You recognise, however, that there is more work to do in this area to ensure that no pupil is disadvantaged by low attendance.

Your curriculum has ensured that pupils feel safe in school. Pupils can articulate the risks when they are online and are confident about the steps they must take to keep themselves safe. They are completely secure that, should they be worried or concerned, adults in school are approachable and will resolve issues promptly. One parent's comment reflected the views of a number who responded to the online questionnaire: 'My children are safe, happy and are engaged with learning through the support and guidance they receive from the excellent staff at Blaydon West.'

Inspection findings

- Senior leaders with responsibility for English and mathematics make a strong contribution to the improvement of teaching, learning and assessment. Their sharp analysis of pupils' assessments and close scrutiny of pupils' workbooks have resulted in well-chosen professional development for staff. Training and guidance provided to teachers, for example in arithmetic and the use of practical resources in mathematics, have led to a rise in standards across the school. Pupils in Year 6 at the end of 2016 made significantly better than average progress in mathematics and all pupils reached at least the nationally expected standard.

- Outcomes achieved by pupils in reading are improving strongly across the school. New approaches to teaching reading, including early reading skills through phonics, have been embedded well. Pupils enjoy the additional opportunities to read in groups with adults and as a class. In Nursery, children now learn their letters and sounds at an earlier stage. These strategies, combined with well-planned additional support for pupils who need to catch up, have resulted in more pupils making good progress to reach the standard expected for their age.
- Leaders use additional funding to good effect. Extra staffing in Years 5 and 6 has enabled teaching to be more precisely focused on the needs of pupils and has led to rapid improvements in the progress made by all, including disadvantaged pupils. Leaders keep a careful check on any new initiatives and refine and tweak their practice to maximise the difference they make.
- Senior leaders are not afraid to invite external scrutiny and support to continually improve their effectiveness. Guidance provided by the local authority supported the deputy headteacher to develop a different approach to the teaching of spelling. The impact of this is apparent in pupils' workbooks, where pupils' spelling is increasingly accurate, and in the above national average spelling standards reached by Year 6 pupils in 2016. However, leaders recognise that not all pupils present their writing neatly and this is an area which requires further work.
- The joint work of the headteacher and the family support worker has led to improvements in the overall attendance of pupils and of disadvantaged pupils so that their attendance is now in line with the national average. Leaders have taken decisive action, including legal action, where pupils' attendance is low, and this had led to some reduction in the number of pupils who are persistently absent. However, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils and girls who are persistently absent remains too high and leaders recognise that this remains a priority for them.
- Leaders track the progress of every pupil and use this information well to challenge individual teachers to raise standards. However, leaders do not always use this information well enough to set precise targets for whole-school improvement. This limits the ability of governors to hold leaders to account for their work. While governors regularly review the work of the school, the chair of the governing body acknowledges the need for additional training so that governors are better placed to interpret the new accountability measures at key stages 1 and 2 and can use these to help them evaluate the school's effectiveness.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the proportion of disadvantaged pupils and girls who are persistently absent is reduced to at least in line with the national average
- all pupils develop a neat handwriting script and take appropriate care with the presentation of their work
- governors receive appropriate training and support so that they can confidently

and accurately judge the school's performance against the new accountability measures for pupils' outcomes.

- targets set for improving the school's performance are precise and measurable so that governors can regularly check on the progress being made.

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

Yours sincerely

Claire Brown
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher and another member of your leadership team. I also met with the chair of the governing body and your local authority school improvement partner, and conducted a telephone discussion with a representative of the local authority. I visited classrooms to observe teaching and to look at pupils' work. I spoke informally to groups of pupils during breaktime and in lessons. I scrutinised the work in pupils' books alongside senior leaders. I evaluated information in relation to pupils' progress throughout the school, the school self-evaluation document, the school development plan and your arrangements for checking the performance of teachers. I reviewed the documentation related to your work to keep pupils safe and examined the information and policies on the school's website. I considered the 32 free text responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View), an email received from a parent and the seven responses to the staff questionnaire.

The key lines of enquiry followed during this inspection related to:

- the outcomes achieved by pupils in key stages 1 and 2, particularly in reading and mathematics
- improvements in the teaching of writing, including the development of pupils' skills in English grammar, punctuation and spelling
- leaders' work to improve pupils' attendance
- the effectiveness of leadership, including governance
- the culture of safeguarding.