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Mrs Elaine Armstrong
Headteacher
Hylton Castle Primary School
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Dear Mrs Armstrong

Short inspection of Hylton Castle Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 25 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 February 2012.

This school continues to be good.

Since the last inspection, you have provided exceptional leadership, which has driven the development of the school and improved outcomes for pupils. Thoughtful planning by you, your staff and governors has also ensured that the move to your new school building has been seamless. Pupils and staff highly appreciate this change and everyone at the school is using this opportunity to improve pupils' learning and personal development further. Along with the deputy headteacher and other school leaders, you have accurately identified the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. Your perceptive school evaluation links well to the development plan to drive further improvement. The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You, your staff and governors have a thorough understanding of the community that you serve. You regularly check parents' views and your surveys show high levels of parental satisfaction with the school. Parents' comments sent to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, were very positive in the vast majority of cases.

You work hard to ensure that your school provides a calm, inclusive and friendly environment. High expectations, consistently applied guidelines and nurturing support help pupils grow in confidence, form good learning behaviours and develop pride in their achievements. At the same time, you and your staff set aspirational learning targets and seek to help all pupils achieve the very best outcomes. You and your staff are reflective and often searching for innovative and exciting ways to

engage pupils in learning. For example, the 'Into the woods' work taking place during the inspection was highly motivating for pupils, who were then given an enriched context to develop their writing skills.

The school has successfully tackled the area identified for improvement at the previous inspection. You have raised pupils' attainment and accelerated their progress, particularly for the more able in writing. Since the last inspection, key stage 2 pupils have made progress which has at least matched that found nationally, and in some years their progress has been significantly above. In 2016, pupils' progress in writing, including for the most able pupils, was similar to that found nationally. However, you recognise that you need to do more to increase the proportion of most-able pupils working at greater depth by the end of Year 6. By the end of key stage 1, the proportions of pupils achieving the expected levels and the proportions working at greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics were above those found nationally.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that current safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are of a high quality. You, your staff and governors give the highest priority to keeping pupils safe. Leaders carry out appropriate checks for all staff, governors and volunteers. The updated safeguarding policy meets current requirements and staff understand the procedures and their own responsibilities. Staff and governors receive regular and appropriate training so they know how to keep pupils safe, including training about how to protect pupils from radicalisation and extremism. Leaders manage effectively referrals to other agencies and they have a determined and resolute approach to following up any safeguarding cases.

Staff provide pupils with teaching and guidance about how to keep themselves safe, including when they are online. Pupils have a good understanding of the different forms that bullying can take and know that staff will help them if they ever have concerns. They also value the playground buddies, who they know will provide them with peer support. Pupils say incidents of bullying are rare in their school. The school's records show that staff quickly address any incidents of misbehaviour and bullying.

Inspection findings

- You and your leaders check the quality of teaching rigorously. Leaders take prompt action to provide support to staff where required and you take a determined approach to ensure that the quality of teaching over time is at least good and that the proportion of outstanding teaching is increasing. Experienced staff provide support to teachers new to the school, which ensures that they make a positive start and that they understand the school's systems.
- Since the last inspection, pupils' progress from key stage 1 to key stage 2 has generally been above that found nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2016, pupils' progress by Year 6 was similar to that found nationally. You and

your leaders have been swift to respond to this. Your arrangements for monitoring pupils' progress match closely to your curriculum. You and your leaders have ensured that all teachers fully understand the end-of-year expectations for pupils' achievement. You are providing opportunities for your strongest teachers to share their practice with other teachers across the school.

- The mathematics leader has a good understanding of the priorities for improvement, takes appropriate action and checks carefully for the required impact. Work to develop opportunities for pupils' reasoning skills and problem-solving have increased. As a result, pupils make good progress from their starting points in key stage 1, and the proportions achieving the expected standard and working at greater depth are greater than those found nationally. By the end of Year 6, the proportion of pupils working at the expected standard is above the average found nationally. However, there is more work to do to increase the proportions working at the higher standard.
- The teaching and learning leader was able to outline many of the strategies that you have introduced to improve pupils' outcomes in English, including spelling, grammar and punctuation. In 2016, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected level on the Year 1 phonics screening check was above the national average. However, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils achieving the expected standard dipped. The school has put in place appropriate interventions to support these pupils and has a good record of accelerating the development of phonics skills for those who have not yet achieved the required standard by the end of Year 1. The introduction of discrete grammar, punctuation and spelling lessons is helping pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, to make good progress in the development of these key skills. Opportunities to write in a range of contexts allow pupils to apply their skills in their 'I'm a writer' books. The introduction of a new handwriting approach has paid dividends and pupils' handwriting is of a good quality.
- Leaders and staff have a clear focus on improving outcomes for all pupils including disadvantaged pupils. Recent refinements to the school's pupil progress tracking systems identify different vulnerable groups along with their prior attainment groups. Leaders set aspirational targets for pupils' progress and attainment.
- Children start in the Nursery with skills and abilities that are generally below and sometimes well below that typical for their age. Most children are making good progress and the proportion achieving a good level of development has been above that found nationally for the last three years. As a result, many pupils are well prepared for starting Year 1. In 2016, the proportion of boys who achieved a good level of development was well below that found for boys nationally. The school's information identifies that, currently, the proportion of boys on track to achieve a good level of development is also low. The recently appointed early years leader is currently reviewing early years provision along with support from the local authority. This will provide an opportunity to identify improvements in provision, with the aim of accelerating the progress of boys.
- You check the attendance of pupils carefully and your overall levels of attendance compare well to national averages. You have taken action to improve the attendance of vulnerable pupils. As a result, there are substantial improvements in the attendance levels of pupils who have special educational needs and/or

disabilities. You and your staff, including the nurture leader, work hard to improve the attendance levels for pupils who have high levels of absence. The range of approaches and support that you provide is improving the attendance levels of many of these pupils.

- High staff expectations and consistently applied behaviour guidelines result in well-behaved pupils in lessons and at playtimes. During the inspection, pupils were friendly, pleased to share their learning and displayed good manners. Opportunities for individual and group responsibility successfully develop pupils' personal and social skills. Leaders use a range of strategies to support pupils whose behaviour places them vulnerable to exclusion. As a result, there has been a fall in exclusions to very low levels and none to date this academic year.
- Leaders make effective use of relevant local authority support to help drive improvements in early years, English and mathematics as appropriate.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they further accelerate pupils' progress, including for the most able pupils, across key stage 2 by sharing the very strong practice provided by middle leaders; and by using the recently developed year group expectations for pupils' progress and attainment
- they further develop early years provision to accelerate boys' progress and raise their attainment to the standards found nationally.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Reeves

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I discussed the work of the school with you, the deputy headteacher and the three leaders for teaching and learning, mathematics and early years, respectively. I talked with pupils about what it feels like to be a member of the school community. I observed and spoke with pupils during playtime and at other times during the day. I held discussions with the local authority representative and with the chair of the governing body, who were able to provide me with additional information. I also took into account school documentation, assessment information, policies and information posted on the school website. I considered the 19 responses to the parent questionnaire, Parent View. Alongside you, I visited five classes to observe teaching and learning, during which time I listened to pupils from a range of abilities read. We looked at pupils' writing,

phonics and reading work to help us evaluate the quality of teaching and learning over time. I also considered behaviour and attendance records and information relating to safeguarding.

This inspection particularly focused upon the following aspects of the school's work:

- leaders' impact on addressing areas for improvement in the previous inspection report
- the accuracy of the school's self-evaluation and quality of the school improvement plan
- leaders and staff actions to address the 2016 dip in pupils' progress from key stage 1 to key stage 2
- the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in phonics, reading and writing, and current pupils' progress
- the impact of leaders and staff actions to improve pupils' attendance levels and reduce levels of exclusion
- children's progress, particularly boys, in early years and learning opportunities in the outdoor learning environment.