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Mr Paul Newton  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Newton

### **Short inspection of Deaf Hill Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 15 February 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 December 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 an ethos of high expectation that has contributed to improving outcomes over time. Pupils are courteous, well behaved and show respectful attitudes towards one another and adults. They value their teaching and appreciate the support they receive from their teachers. The supportive environment, combined with clear leadership and good teaching, enable pupils to make good progress and achieve strong outcomes.

You and your teachers have responded robustly to the heightened demands of the new national curriculum and assessment tasks. Through effective planning and well-tailored teaching, pupils made progress that was well above that seen nationally in mathematics and writing and broadly average in reading. In addition, across key stages 1 and 2 and the early years, pupils achieved outcomes that were above those seen nationally in the vast majority of areas, with the exception of reading at key stage 2. This success was replicated elsewhere in the curriculum where pupils again achieved outcomes that were above those seen nationally in science.

You and your team are committed to promoting the wider development of pupils. The broad and balanced curriculum is enriched by wider experiences and learning opportunities. Pupils value the close focus upon key skills of literacy and numeracy alongside more creative opportunities in subjects such as art. Pupils have extensive opportunities to participate in a range of sports, including swimming, football, rugby

and netball. The school also addresses the needs of pupils who may be less active through programmes that encourage participation in alternative sports such as boccia. Staff, governors and pupils are proud of the school's place in the community. On the day of the inspection, pupils won the Durham inter-generational award for the quality of their partnership work with older residents on a year-long second world war project.

You and your deputy headteacher have provided clear leadership that has led to the continuing improvements in standards. Together, you have accurately monitored the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' progress over time, supported by advisers from the local authority and external consultants. You have also developed the roles of your key stage 1 leader in checking the quality of phonics teaching and sharing good practice, while also developing the leadership of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. From September 2016, you have shared your headship responsibilities at Deaf Hill Primary School with those at nearby Kelloe Primary School. This role provides new opportunities for sharing good practice but also brings challenges and a need to further develop the wider capacity of leadership at the school. Progress monitoring and performance management procedures encourage teachers to reflect upon their practice. However, there remains a need to sustain long-term improvement by extending leadership responsibilities to a wider range of teachers to lead teaching developments, monitor standards and become more deeply involved in professional development activities.

Governors are proud of the school and are committed to its ongoing success. They have close links with the local community and believe passionately in the central position the school holds in the community. The majority of parents hold the school in high esteem, although a small minority hold more negative views on aspects of care and communication. The chair and vice-chair have instigated stronger monitoring activities, including shared learning walks to check leaders' views of standards. Governors sought firm assurances that Deaf Hill would not suffer as a result of the headteacher's new role at Kelloe Primary School. Governors are becoming more assiduous in tracking pupils' progress and review teacher performance and pay progression with increasing rigour. Governors embrace training opportunities to develop their own understanding of key issues, including pupils' progress and safeguarding. Such training and support will need to continue to further increase governors' capacity to independently hold leaders to account, particularly given the headteacher's increased responsibilities.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The headteacher and his team are continually mindful of pupils' welfare and safety and take their safeguarding responsibilities seriously. Appropriate checks are made on the suitability of adults working at the school. Concerns over pupils' welfare are swiftly addressed. Staff and governors receive up-to-date training on key safeguarding issues. Pupils feel safe and well supported in school and the vast majority of their parents agree. In conversation, pupils said that bullying did not happen at school and, if it did, they were confident that teachers and other adults would effectively address this. Pupils were able to discuss the actions they could

take to remain safe, for example the actions needed to stay safe on the road and online.

## **Inspection findings**

- You and your team have sustained high expectations and built increasing rigour into teaching, learning and assessment that has enabled pupils to respond well to more challenging curriculum demands. In the 2016 national tests at the end of key stage 2, pupils made progress in mathematics and writing that was well above that seen nationally. In addition, the proportion of pupils who both met and exceeded the expected standards in writing, mathematics and science, and grammar, punctuation and spelling was better than that seen nationally. These successes were emulated in mathematics, writing and science at key stage 1.
- Teaching is typically good across the curriculum. Teachers demonstrate effective subject expertise and use questions to deepen understanding. They set clear classroom routines that develop positive learning behaviours in pupils who sustain concentration and cooperate effectively in group tasks.
- Leaders have placed a strong emphasis upon developing pupils' phonics skills, which in 2016 contributed to outcomes in the phonics screening check that were above those seen nationally. Pupils have responded eagerly to new reading programmes that are encouraging them to read a wider variety of texts and develop a more confident grasp of vocabulary.
- Pupils' comprehension skills are not as fully developed as their abilities to recognise the links between letters and sounds. Pupils' progress in reading in 2016 was average, while the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard was below that seen nationally. Leaders have introduced initiatives to build vocabulary and develop pupils' inference and deduction skills but more work is needed on this as pupils do not have enough opportunities to apply their comprehension skills.
- Pupils develop strong writing skills that accelerate significantly as they progress to upper key stage 2. Pupils develop a stronger understanding of key grammatical features that they use to increasing effect in many types of text. They structure writing effectively and have a confident understanding of grammatical features and how to use them in differing types of writing, including persuasive, narrative and argumentative pieces of writing.
- Pupils achieve extremely strong outcomes in mathematics as a result of thorough planning and effective teaching. Pupils are given numerous opportunities to apply their skills and explore arithmetic methods. Work in mathematics books revealed comprehensive coverage of the curriculum and a range of tasks that consolidated and deepened pupils' mathematical understanding and reasoning.
- As a result of thorough planning, close tracking and effective questioning, children make extremely strong progress in the early years from starting points that are below those typical for their age. The new nursery provision has improved transition for children, who settle swiftly. Children show good concentration in teacher-led tasks and curiosity and imagination in more open activities. Outcomes have improved consistently over a three-year period such

that children now achieve levels of development that are above those seen nationally.

- Teachers track pupils' progress through termly assessments but this is complemented by more frequent measures of their mathematical, phonics and vocabulary development. The majority of teachers provide written and verbal feedback in line with the school's policy that supports pupils in making good progress.
- Pupils show considerable pride in their work and in their school uniform. They conduct themselves in a friendly and orderly manner around the site. They are active members of the school community and the vast majority participate in the many and varied extra-curricular activities. The school has held the sportsmark gold award for three consecutive years for pupils' extensive involvement in a range of sports, including activities specifically aimed at pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Leaders have instigated a number of strategies to improve attendance. They have commissioned the services of their own parent support adviser to work with families to remove barriers and introduced a mixture of incentives to promote attendance alongside firmer sanctions for families that do not respond. Despite these efforts, absence and persistent absence rates remain above those seen nationally and more needs to be done to successfully improve attendance and build closer links with harder-to-reach families.
- Leaders carefully diagnose the requirements of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. These pupils made good progress in reading, writing and mathematics in 2016 and their current progress in school remains strong. Disadvantaged pupils are currently making good progress and in 2016 national tests made much better progress than other pupils nationally in writing and mathematics. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils that reached the expected standard or reached a higher score in writing, mathematics and science, and grammar, spelling and punctuation was above that for other pupils nationally. This achievement was largely emulated at key stage 1. However, disadvantaged pupils made slower progress in reading. The most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, achieved higher scores or levels of greater depth above those seen nationally across reading, writing and mathematics in 2016.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- review strategies and intensify actions to reduce levels of absence and persistent absence
- improve standards of reading in key stages 1 and 2 by developing pupils' skills of inference and deduction and giving them further opportunities to apply their comprehension skills
- sustain long-term improvement by building leadership capacity across the school and giving teachers increasing responsibility for monitoring standards and sharing

good practice

- further develop governors' training and clarify their monitoring responsibilities to give them greater autonomy in holding leaders to account.

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**

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher and middle leaders. I also spoke to seven members of the governing body, including the vice-chair. I held a meeting with a group of pupils and talked to pupils less formally in lessons. I also talked to the education development partner from the local authority. I undertook a learning walk 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 19 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire and 12 free-text responses. I also took into account 18 responses to the pupil questionnaire and 19 responses to the staff questionnaire.