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Mr Andy Buckler
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Dear Mr Buckler

Short inspection of Torkington Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 28 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 October 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Under your leadership the school continues to improve. You and your leadership team have created an environment where pupils can feel safe and thrive, both academically and in their personal development. Together with your staff, you have created a strong sense of enjoyment in learning. Pupils feel that they are an important part of the learning community; they have a clear sense of ownership in their school, have involvement in its improvement and have a part to play in making sure learning is fun.

Most parents who spoke to me, or responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, were positive about the school and would recommend it to others. A number of parents particularly appreciate that you and your staff 'nurture' their child's development and say that their child 'loves school'. It is clear from pupils' high attendance that they are eager to come to school every day.

The very large majority of staff who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire are proud to be part of Torkington, and say that the school is led effectively and they feel well supported. Staff share a strong sense of wanting to create a culture of aspiration and challenge for pupils. To this end, staff work diligently to make sure that pupils make as much progress as possible in their learning and as young citizens.

In 2016, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development at the end of Reception and the percentage of Year 1 pupils who met the expected standard in the national phonics screening check were above national averages. At the end of key stage 1, an above-average proportion of pupils reached the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics. However, in these subjects the percentage of pupils achieving greater depth was below the percentage for pupils of a similar age nationally. You have been quick to identify the reasons for this. You have put actions in place to ensure that more pupils are now on track to achieve at greater depth in 2017 and indications are that your plans are successful.

At the end of key stage 2, pupils achieved above those of a similar age at the expected standard in reading, writing, mathematics and grammar, punctuation and spelling. Also, the proportion of pupils achieving higher standards in reading and grammar, punctuation and spelling were above national averages. You are working hard to increase the proportion of pupils who are similarly successful in mathematics and writing, particularly pupils of middle-ability and those who are most-able. The actions you have put in place are already leading to further improvement in these areas and more pupils are now on track to achieve at higher standards.

At the previous inspection, inspectors identified a need to raise the quality of teaching by using existing exemplary teaching to provide models across the whole school. They also required the school to ensure that pupils' progress was regularly checked so that their learning could be effectively supported. Leaders have ensured that improvements have taken place.

There have been staffing changes since the last inspection, with an increased staff turnover in the last year. There is a comprehensive range of professional opportunities for staff and a constructive package of development for newly qualified teachers in the school. As a result, leaders are rebuilding a strong teaching team who are consistent in their approach and confident to deliver good-quality learning which responds to the changes in the new curriculum. This is most noticeable in the delivery of mathematics, phonics and guided reading. Experienced, high-quality staff are being used well to guide and mentor the newer staff, which has led to high expectations and the building of a strong teaching capacity in school for the future.

The very large majority of pupils are well supported in their learning. Information about pupils' progress is regularly collected, particularly for groups of pupils that you are monitoring closely. Leaders use this information effectively to ensure that these pupils' needs are being met and teaching continues to improve. Pupils are enthusiastic to respond to feedback in their workbooks and are keen to respond to advice to improve their learning. However, I agree with you that assessment information could be refined even further to ensure that more pupils of middle and high ability are challenged to reach greater depth in their learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your team have ensured that pupils have a safe and secure environment by promoting the clear message that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Safeguarding arrangements are rigorous and records are detailed and kept securely. Regular and appropriate training for staff and governors is undertaken and up to date, including that related to keeping pupils safe from radicalisation and extremism. Your vigilance around the care and support of vulnerable pupils is of a good standard. Leaders have effective relationships with other agencies and are persistent in situations where vulnerable pupils need extra support or advocacy.

Pupils say they feel very safe and well cared for in school and gave the inspector many examples of how the teachers help with this. They are confident that adults will help them if needed. A very small number of parents expressed a concern about bullying in school. However, the majority of parents who shared their views with me either did not consider bullying an issue that they were aware of, or, if they did, they stated that bullying was rare and quickly followed up by the school. Pupils confirmed that bullying and inappropriate behaviour was very rare and felt that adults deal with any situations quickly. Pupils, particularly older ones, talk with knowledge about the ways they can stay safe in a range of situations, including personally and online. The very large majority of parents feel that you and the staff look after their children and keep them safe.

Inspection findings

- A key focus for the inspection was leaders' knowledge of the school's strengths and priorities. It is clear you know your school well. From the outset of the inspection, you demonstrated a reflective and accurate evaluation of what is working successfully and areas in need of further work. These capture your high expectations and consistency of approach, and are used effectively to ensure that everyone in school is clear about the direction in which they are heading. Your governors are supportive and challenge effectively where needed. You are still establishing your new leadership team but there are clear indications that there is a good capacity for improving the school further.
- You have correctly identified the need to further improve the achievement of pupils in writing across the school, and also to increase the proportion of pupils achieving greater depth or higher standards in reading, mathematics and, in particular, writing. To this end you have taken decisive action. For example, you have introduced a successful approach to mathematics to develop skills, reasoning and opportunities to extend learners further. You are currently exploring ways to adapt these approaches to further challenge learners in their thought processes and skills so they become strong, independent writers.
- The strong focus on phonics and reading in school enables pupils to make good progress, achieve well and enjoy books. The school's approach and delivery is consistent across year groups and is of a high standard. Pupils benefit from the equally good level of skill and subject knowledge from both teachers and support staff. As a result, pupils visibly enjoy lessons.

- Another focus for the inspection was provision for children in the early years. Children start the early years with skills and knowledge that are typical for their age. There is good-quality provision and teaching offered to children across both classes. Many activities are developed through children's interests and these are well balanced with input and guidance from adults. As a result, children make good progress and are well equipped to start in Year 1. A strong emphasis on number, phonics, mark making and sharing books is evident in all areas of provision, including outside. Children visibly enjoy engaging in this wide range of activities. As a result, children are happy and keen to learn.
- There are a number of strengths within the school that contribute to the school remaining good. Pupils have very good attitudes to learning. They are encouraged to be actively involved in the life of the school, including contributing to shaping and influencing aspects of it. For example, the pupils learning council developed a 'terrific checklist' which outlines for teachers, learners, and in lessons and the classroom, what great teaching and learning looks like. This includes teachers being 'happy, smiley and able to take a joke' and learners 'listening, learning from each other and being enthusiastic'. Members of the learning council are given time to monitor that the checklist is being adhered to and are confident and encouraged to say if it is not.
- Personal development is central to the work of the school. Pupils are keen to say that they are welcomed and how they are 'surrounded by kind, caring children and adults'. They highly value the time they are given to talk in 'circle time' and are excellent ambassadors for the emphasis the school places on developing 'can-do' skills such as 'resilience' and 'risk-taking'. These skills are invaluable in supporting all pupils, including those with vulnerabilities, so that they can build confident, affirming life skills.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to keep a close eye on making sure that the middle-ability and most-able pupils are challenged and extended in lessons, so more achieve greater depth and higher standards, particularly in writing
- teachers develop further their questioning skills to extend pupils in their thinking
- they continue to refine assessment information so that teachers can pinpoint precisely pupils' next steps in learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Sue Eastwood
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you and one of your assistant headteachers. I also met with the person responsible for maintaining safeguarding and attendance records. I met with four governors, including the chair of the governing body, and I spoke to a representative of Stockport local authority. We visited lessons and I scrutinised pupils' work. I took account of the 61 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as the views of eight parents spoken to before the school day. I took account of the 12 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and spoke to staff during the day. I also met with a group of pupils. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school. I looked at a number of documents including: information about pupils' achievement; your school self-evaluation; the school improvement plan; behaviour and incident logs; and documents relating to safeguarding.