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Mrs Helen Sutton
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Sutton

Short inspection of Fulford Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 2 March 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 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Leaders and governors have an accurate view of the school's effectiveness and have achieved a significant number of improvements to the early years and the school's curriculum since the previous inspection.

Leaders, staff and governors have formed strong relationships with pupils and families. This is reflected in the vast majority of parents paying tribute to the efforts of your staff, most of whom agree that they have chosen this school because, as one put it, 'The staff really care for our children and always put them first.' Parents are right. The staff value pupils' work and efforts. This is evident in the good range of well-presented work in pupils' books and on displays portraying the very best examples of their achievements.

As a result of a sharp focus on raising standards, pupils achieve well in all four classes across this small village primary school. You and the staff ensure that pupils develop into mature and well-rounded individuals who are well prepared for the next stage of their education when they leave Year 6. The areas identified for improvement at the time of the previous inspection have been addressed. At the same time you have extended the creative curriculum even further. Pupils thoroughly enjoy lessons, outdoor activities and good opportunities to learn to speak French or to learn to play a brass or stringed instrument. Their enjoyment of school is reflected in good and improving attendance rates and excellent behaviour.

Pupils confidently talked to me about their work and progress. As you know, the inspection took place when you were all celebrating 'World Book Day' and I was particularly impressed by the high standard of reading and writing achieved by pupils in key stage 2 as well as the confident and independent reading skills displayed by pupils in the key stage 1 class. Pupils read aloud with confidence and fluency. Their story writing is lively, imaginative and interesting with accurate punctuation that helps them to read with expression. Leaders, staff and governors have successfully managed to raise the profile of literacy. This is clearly reflected in the time and investment put into your excellent and well-resourced library. The wide range of books, genres and authors that pupils experience spark their imagination and inspire them to produce accurate independent writing.

The foundations laid in the early years prepare the youngest children well, particularly in their development of language, literacy and number, as well as in their social and emotional development. Current assessments indicate that the large majority of children in the Reception Year are on track to reach a good level of development in literacy and mathematics. This is a significant rise compared with last year's cohort, although variations from year to year are understandable given the small numbers. The children in last year's Reception class (current Year 1) include a significant number of children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. These children are making good progress towards their individual learning targets.

The very small numbers taking national tests and assessments each year make it difficult to identify a reliable pattern or trend in pupils' achievement. However, typically, as pupils move up the school they reach above-average standards in reading and writing by the end of Year 6. In addition, you and your staff have improved the way letters and sounds are taught (phonics), which provides the bedrock of skills pupils need to become independent and competent readers and writers.

There have been good improvements to the way leaders, governors and staff use assessment information. Staff are able to review pupils' progress and performance accurately and regularly to identify if and when pupils fall behind in order to provide extra support. The most recent national tests in 2016 show that pupils in Years 2 and 6 made good progress in relation to their starting points. This is still the case in all four classes. For example, all groups of pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, make consistently good progress in reading and writing so that the vast majority are on track to reach or exceed age-related standards.

You have recognised, rightly, that standards are improving well in mathematics too, but there is still room for more improvement as pupils make relatively slower progress in mathematics compared with reading and writing. There are two reasons for this. First, teachers and support staff do not always ask questions or provide tasks that extend or consolidate pupils' calculation and problem-solving skills. Second, in some workbooks it was evident that pupils complete too many tasks at the same level of complexity before moving on to harder work.

Pupils' work and assessments also highlight another reason for their relatively slower progress in mathematics. The targets and predicted learning goals set for pupils are not always ambitious enough. This is especially the case for pupils who have the potential to exceed age-related standards. We discussed this in detail and you and the assessment manager were very clear about the plans you have put in place to address this. There are early signs of improvement in all four classes as you have rightly identified this as a core priority in the school improvement plan.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding procedures are robust and fit for purpose. You and your staff, including administrative and support staff, know the needs of pupils well and you keep diligent records of any concerns about pupils' safety and welfare. Leaders, governors and staff provide an effective curriculum and lessons on e-safety, as well as providing well-supervised out-of-school-hours activities that provide good opportunities for pupils to learn how to play and stay safe. The school council also makes a good contribution towards helping and supporting pupils and its members are effective ambassadors who make a significant contribution to the school community and well-being of pupils.

Inspection findings

- You may recall that at the start of the inspection we agreed some key lines of enquiry to see whether you, the staff and governors are focusing on the right priorities for improvement.
- The teaching we observed, the work in pupils' books and assessment information show that teaching remains good and that pupils achieve well in all four classes.
- I checked current attendance rates because last year there was a high level of persistent absenteeism. This is no longer the case as current attendance figures are above last year's national average. The range of activities and the stimulating curriculum that you and the staff provide mean that pupils enjoy their time in school and typically attend school regularly as a result.
- Pupils told me that learning is fun. This was evident when we saw key stage 1 pupils outdoors in the woodland areas building small structures (houses) for the 'three little pigs'. The teacher very thoughtfully combined a familiar and traditional story with science and art, enabling pupils to test different materials and build structures creatively while role playing the story with their classmates.
- Pupils behave very well and are keen to do their best. The wonderful range of writing, artwork and displays of pupils' work around the school demonstrate how well your staff value pupils' efforts and achievements. Past assessments also show that the very small number of disadvantaged pupils also attend school regularly and achieve as well as other pupils who are not disadvantaged.

- Pupils achieve very well using computers and mobile devices. Information and communication technology is used very well to support and promote learning across all subjects of the national curriculum.
- The teaching of phonics is very effective in the early years and key stage 1. Teachers and teaching assistants are highly skilled at supporting pupils. I could see during lessons that several pupils developed their phonics skills competently to tackle unfamiliar words when reading independently. Even the youngest children in the Reception Year can break down letter sounds in words and then join them together to read with confidence and increasing fluency. The development of early literacy skills such as phonics and spelling is very effective and results in typically well above average phonics screening results in Year 1 and Year 2.
- These early literacy skills lay strong foundations for pupils in key stage 2. The focus on improving pupils' writing in both key stage 2 classes has been successful. Pupils develop a consistent writing style with accurate form and structure. The quality and range of writing completed by pupils as well as spelling assessments show that pupils achieve well in writing.
- As you know, we discussed the reasons why, over time, pupils tend to do less well in mathematics compared with reading and writing. I also shared these thoughts with governors and we all agreed that the current focus on improving teaching and learning in mathematics needs to continue. It was encouraging to see this as a priority in the school improvement plan. The focus on teaching and the use made of assessment information is the right priority for improvement, reflecting accurate self-evaluations by leaders and staff. The focus for leaders and teachers now is to make sure that pupils are provided with the right level of challenge in lessons as well as setting more ambitious targets for them to aim for in mathematics.
- Assessments show improvement already in mathematics. Currently, more pupils than last year are on track to reach higher standards in all four classes. This trend needs to continue.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- they continue to improve teaching and pupils' achievement in mathematics; they should make sure that teachers pose questions and provide tasks that extend, challenge and deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding
- they build on the work done, improving and refining assessment information to set more challenging learning targets for pupils to aim for in mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Charalambos Loizou
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the assessment manager and two governors, including the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. I also spoke by telephone to two school improvement advisers, one of whom is appointed by the governing body and the other commissioned by Staffordshire local authority. Both advisers provide support to leaders, governors and staff and carry out evaluations of the school's work. We visited every class together to observe some teaching, looked at pupils' work in books and spoke to pupils during lessons. I also spoke to pupils during morning breaktime and at lunchtime and then to a small group in the afternoon. I spoke to some parents at the start and end of the school day and considered the 39 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as 36 written comments sent to Ofsted's regional office. I scrutinised the school improvement plan and priorities, and discussed with you and the assessment manager how leaders monitor the quality and effectiveness of teaching. I scrutinised the most recent assessments of pupils' attainment and progress and the 2016 national test results. I also checked current attendance rates at the school. I checked staff vetting and safeguarding procedures to determine whether the school's arrangements for safeguarding are effective.