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Mrs Kate Longstaff  
Headteacher  
Acre Rigg Infant School  
Acre Rigg Road  
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County Durham  
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Dear Mrs Longstaff

### **Short inspection of Acre Rigg Infant School**

Following my visit to the school on 22 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 May 2012.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your high standards, strong leadership and sharp focus on what could be even better have ensured that the school continues to meet pupils' needs well. The school's vision, 'to be the best we can be', is palpable in every corner of school life. There is strong evidence that, together, you and your team are making a significant difference to the lives of your pupils.

Parents appreciate how approachable and responsive the staff are. They particularly value how well you personally, and the staff in general, know them and their children. Parents comment that communication is effective and enables them to provide the right support for their children. Comments such as 'the school always goes the extra mile to help', and 'all concerns no matter how small are dealt with swiftly' are common. Parents feel well informed about their child's learning and feel that leaders ensure their children are safe, well cared for and supported effectively in making good progress.

The governing body recognises the impact of the effective leadership you provide and is extremely supportive of you. Governors sensibly look for ways to hold you to account and they carry out visits to see the school in action. There is no doubt that leaders, including governors, have high aspirations for what the pupils can achieve, both academically and socially. However, while they are aware that disadvantaged pupils are supported effectively and generally make good progress, they have not been rigorous enough in interrogating the progress of different groups, especially

the disadvantaged pupils, to ensure they are working at the same level as their peers. This has rightly been, and continues to be, a focus for the school and has resulted in improvements in this area. You have sensibly taken action to provide these pupils with bespoke and specific teaching support and use pupil premium funding to ensure pupils benefit from a greater degree of adult attention. You have also increased the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, which was below that of other pupils. Through your interventions and individual support, attendance for this group is now broadly average and the progress these pupils make is increasing. There remains a need for leaders to ensure that the website is compliant and fully informs parents of the impact of the spending of the pupil premium grant and sports grant.

Your self-evaluation is accurate and, as a leadership team, you accurately identify where improvements need to be made and quickly implement the necessary steps to tackle any weaknesses. For example, you correctly and rapidly identified that the 2016 key stage 1 assessments showed your most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, were not making the best possible progress. You knew that this was not an accurate representation of the strong progress and work at greater depth they had demonstrated in their work in class. You accepted that the school's accuracy in assessment and moderation of work was not as robust as it should have been. As a result you immediately tackled these issues and introduced more effective and regular assessments and pupil progress meetings. With other schools in the Peterlee Teaching Alliance, you now moderate pupils' work frequently and accurately. Current information shows a much higher proportion of current pupils achieving at greater depth in all subjects.

Leaders and governors have effectively tackled the areas that were identified for improvement in the last inspection report. The school was asked to raise attainment in reading by improving the teaching of phonics and ensuring pupils become fluent readers by the end of key stage 1. You have tackled this successfully by implementing a very effective approach to the linking of letters to sounds. You have also re-organised the reading curriculum, improved methods, and increased the involvement of parents in supporting pupils reading at home. As a result, standards are rising in the early years, in the end of Year 1 phonics checks and also at the end of Year 2. Pupils are proud to show their photographs on the weekly 'Proud Cloud', which celebrates those reading four times per week.

You have successfully improved the opportunities for children throughout school to work independently. The school's approach to learning promotes resilience and independent learning in all classes, as well as complementing the behaviour system effectively. Pupils are eager to achieve their gem rewards for 'Super learning powers' of perseverance and for helping others, for example. They are now prepared to have a go themselves rather than immediately asking for an adult's support. They are prepared to take risks, and because of the very positive relationships they have no concerns about making a mistake. The highly stimulating environment you have created, along with readily accessible resources, also promotes pupils' ability to learn independently of others and in gaining independent skills.

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

The very positive recent health and safeguarding audit shows you provide a safe environment for your pupils. School leaders and governors do all they can to ensure pupils are safe. Staff checks are carried out with rigour and the school adheres closely to local authority recommendations and guidance. Recording of these checks is meticulous. Governors and staff have undergone appropriate training for their roles and responsibilities. Staff record any concerns appropriately and referrals to outside agencies are made when necessary.

As at the last inspection, care and support for pupils are strengths of the school. Pupils' emotional needs and well-being are carefully considered. This culture of care for one another is found among adults and pupils alike. Pupils see it as their responsibility to look out for each other.

## **Inspection findings**

- Since the last inspection, you and your senior leaders have continued to drive improvements with rigour, determination and commitment. Governors and staff strongly support your vision for the school to provide the best possible educational experience for your pupils. This is a close community, where leaders, staff, governors and parents all work together to achieve the best for the pupils.
- The literacy, numeracy and phonics workshops, the provision of an online book resource and tours of the school to see teaching and learning in progress with staff provide parents with helpful guidance. These opportunities are allowing parents to ably support their children in their learning at home, so that they make better progress.
- However, while most pupils do make at least the progress expected of them, the difference in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally was too high last year. The difference diminished in 2014 and 2015, but widened last year. You have recognised this and have made this a priority in your school improvement plan, and the difference is now diminishing again.
- You provide a rich, varied and imaginative curriculum and the effective teachers and support staff have very strong relationships with pupils. This is helping pupils to develop into confident, competent and emotionally secure young people. The walls are adorned with some very attractive displays which show a broad and balanced curriculum, including a good range of art work and studies of local history. Cross-curricular learning is well planned so that it incorporates moments of awe and wonder that feed pupils' imagination.
- You place great importance on continual professional development to ensure that all staff continue to develop their teaching. Any planned initiatives are carefully researched, adapted and then embedded thoroughly in the everyday practice of teachers. This is having a positive impact on pupil outcomes. For example, the school's approach to improving reading, challenge, independence and resilience is very effective.

- Leaders ensure that teachers are clear about the literacy and numeracy skills that need to be strengthened through these professional development opportunities. The teaching in non-core subjects, and in science, is effective because teachers have strong subject knowledge, and, as a result, pupils employ key subject language to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding confidently.
- To further improve the challenge for all pupils, and check more effectively the progress pupils make, you have introduced a new assessment system. This provides teachers with accurate information on what their pupils know, understand and can do. As a result, teachers now plan activities which meet pupils' specific needs precisely. Leaders are not complacent and they check that procedures are implemented consistently in every class. In particular, the targets set for the most able pupils are checked to ensure that they are sufficiently challenging to increase the proportions of pupils working at greater depth. The progress of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is monitored closely. If there is any sign that pupils are falling behind, teachers respond immediately to ensure they catch up with highly focused individual and small-group support.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is supported well through assemblies, discussions in class and relevant activities. Pupils have a growing awareness of British values and where they might see them in action. For example, when explaining how they became school councillors or UNICEF rights-respecting ambassadors, they recognised that their peers had voted for them democratically. They also understand the need for rules. All pupils adhere to their three school rules of following instructions quickly, making the right choices and being kind to each other.
- Pupils learn how to be healthy and to keep themselves safe. They confidently described the dangers of using the internet and crossing the road. Pupils demonstrate care and respect for adults and their peers. Behaviour is very good in lessons and around the school. Pupils listen attentively and are keen to learn. They have purposeful discussions about activities and remain on task for sustained periods of time. This is evident in the youngest classes through to Year 2.
- A considerable strength of the school is the quality of care, guidance and support provided for your pupils, and for parents and carers. A strong culture of staff working closely together, with experts and other agencies, provides pupils with the necessary support to move their learning on. This high level of support enables the most vulnerable pupils to thrive.
- Most pupils love coming to school and attend regularly. However, last year a number of pupils were absent too regularly. You have rightly tightened up on your procedures and there have been significant improvements. You chase up absences on the first day and then use your family support advisers to make home visits if needed. The weekly attendance awards and certificates which celebrate good attendance are motivating pupils because they do not want to let their classmates down. In addition, a very well-attended breakfast club provides a healthy meal and an enjoyable start to the school day and so this too promotes school attendance well.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the difference in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils continues to diminish
- governors check and challenge leaders over the achievement of disadvantaged pupils more rigorously, and ensure that this challenge is recorded effectively in governing body minutes
- the website complies with government requirements in that it more accurately and precisely informs parents of the impact of pupil premium and sport premium spending on pupils' outcomes.

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

Stephen Bywater  
**Ofsted Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

I met with you and together we visited each class, where I briefly observed teaching and learning, spoke to pupils and scrutinised work in pupils' books. I also met with a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body, and I met with two representatives from the local authority. I spoke to a group of pupils from Year 2 and listened to some of them read. I considered the 19 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also took account of staff views through the 27 online responses. I analysed a range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation, school improvement plans, information about pupils' progress and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures.

