

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Jacqueline Ball
Headteacher
Durham Lane Primary School
Amberley Way
Eaglescliffe
Stockton-on-Tees
TS16 0NG

Dear Mrs Ball

Short inspection of Durham Lane Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 20 June 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 your school was judged to be good in March 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your team have sustained a culture of high academic expectation that has led to consistently good outcomes over time in all phases. You have strengthened school leadership by giving subject and key stage leaders increasing responsibility for improving teaching and monitoring standards. All teachers contribute to a calm and purposeful atmosphere where pupils are courteous and well behaved. Pupils enjoy and value their teaching and appreciate the support they receive from their teachers. Through strong leadership and effective teaching, pupils achieve strong outcomes and make good progress.

You and your teachers have responded robustly to the heightened demands of the new national curriculum and assessment tasks. Teachers' thorough planning and subject expertise contributed to outcomes at key stage 2 in 2016 that were well above those seen nationally. Pupils made particularly strong progress in mathematics and good progress in reading. This picture was reflected in the majority of areas at key stage 1, while outcomes in the phonics screening check were ranked in the top 8% of all schools nationally. The proportion of pupils achieving a good level of development in the early years remains above that seen nationally. Your team have reflected upon last year's outcomes and brought in more rigorous approaches to reading and mathematics that are enabling current pupils to make even stronger progress. There are signs that increasing proportions of the most able pupils are working at greater depth through work that is better pitched to their abilities. This was reflected in 2016 in their strong outcomes in mathematics at

key stage 2 and in all areas at key stage 1. However, there remain occasions when these pupils are not as consistently challenged, particularly in subjects such as science, geography and history.

Leaders check pupils' progress through formal termly tracking and at regular staff meetings. Teachers account for pupils' progress and outline any changes to planning and teaching to address any underachievement. Senior leaders monitor the quality of teaching and the standard of work in books and increasingly invite middle leaders to participate in these tasks. Middle leaders are involved in performance management procedures and meet with governors to review performance in their areas of responsibility. This is contributing to stronger leadership across the school, although subject leaders' monitoring of the curriculum and pupils' progress in science, geography and history is not as strong as it is in English and mathematics.

You have developed partnerships with other schools in order to share good practice, moderate standards and develop leadership. Subject and phase leaders meet with partners and local cluster groups to develop the curriculum and pursue developments, such as approaches to the teaching of mastery in mathematics. Your school has become more outward-facing and welcoming of challenge, as evident in your recent invitation to three of your partner headteachers to review the quality of teaching at Durham Lane. Pupils also benefit from partnerships with your local secondary school, with specialist teaching for your most-able mathematicians and reading and understanding initiatives for other pupils. Teachers even visit ex-Durham Lane pupils in the early stages of Year 7 at secondary school to check that the high standards pupils leave with in Year 6 are continued in the next stage of their educational journey.

You and your team promote the wider development of pupils. The strong academic rigour in English and mathematics is supported by breadth in the topic-based curriculum that creates meaningful links between subjects. In art, pupils study the work of artists such as Matisse and Seurat and use their work to stimulate their own artwork and creative writing. Pupils have opportunities to participate in a range of sports, including swimming, football, cricket and tennis, achieving considerable success in the latter two. Music plays an important part in the life of the school, and pupils in the school choir have performed at The Sage, Gateshead and Birmingham Symphony Hall. In their response to the pupil questionnaire, the vast majority of pupils said that they took part in some form of extra-curricular activity or club.

Governors are committed to the ongoing success of the school. They have close links with the local community and gather parents' views at events such as parents' evenings. The vast majority of parents hold the school in high esteem and appreciate the support their children receive from leaders and teachers, although a small minority hold more negative views on aspects of care and communication. Governors monitor the work of school leaders carefully. They check pupils' progress and monitor the impact of additional funding, such as the use of the pupil premium and the use of funding to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or

disabilities. Governors have particular areas of responsibility and meet senior and middle leaders to check the impact of their work. They embrace training opportunities to enable them to examine data more thoroughly and to ensure that safeguarding procedures are up to date and effective.

Safeguarding is effective.

The headteacher and her team are mindful of pupils' welfare and safety and take their safeguarding responsibilities seriously. Rigorous checks are made on the suitability of adults working at the school. Concerns over pupils' welfare are swiftly addressed and records are accurately maintained. Staff and governors receive up-to-date training on key safeguarding issues in order to help them to keep children safe. Pupils feel safe and well supported in school and the vast majority of their parents agree. In conversation and in a substantial response to the Ofsted pupil questionnaire, pupils said that bullying rarely happened 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 consistently high standards of teaching, learning and assessment and responded purposefully to the demands of a more-challenging curriculum with more-demanding assessment. This is reflected in consistently high outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics. Ofsted's own inspection dashboard has identified no weaknesses in pupils' academic performance over a three-year period. This sustained performance is a result of the high expectations of leaders and teachers to achieve the very best outcomes for pupils.
- Teaching is typically good across the curriculum. Teachers demonstrate effective subject knowledge, particularly in English and mathematics, and use questions to deepen understanding. Teachers develop positive learning behaviours in pupils who share ideas and reflect upon their learning, often reviewing one another's work. Pupils concentrate well in quiet tasks and cooperate effectively in group tasks.
- Teachers develop pupils' reading skills effectively and phonics teaching is a strength, with pupils in 2016 achieving outcomes that placed them in the top 8% of schools nationally. Pupils achieved outcomes in reading at key stages 1 and 2 that were also above those seen nationally. Recent initiatives to further strengthen pupils' ability to infer meaning are leading to better rates of progress and increasing proportions of pupils working at greater depth.
- Pupils develop strong writing skills and have frequent opportunities to write in a range of genres. Pupils are confident writing at length from an early age and show a strong understanding of how to use key grammatical features 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. Many of the girls are particularly strong writers and boys also make above-average progress, although occasional lapses in spelling can occur.

- Pupils, and particularly middle-ability pupils, make extremely good progress and achieve 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. They are confident mathematicians who enjoy opportunities to apply their knowledge. 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 good planning, effective support and close tracking, children make good progress in the early years and consistently achieve levels of development above those seen nationally. In Reception class, effective support is provided for children with additional needs. Children enjoy their learning and respond attentively to teacher-led tasks. They show curiosity and imagination in more-open activities. Pupils' learning journals reveal good signs of progress.
- Teachers track pupils' progress through termly assessments and this is complemented by more frequent reviews and discussions at key stage meetings. Leaders have modified assessment systems to make them more suitable for classroom practice and more helpful in informing improvements. The vast majority of teachers provide written and verbal feedback in line with the school's policy that supports pupils in making good progress.
- Pupils are friendly and courteous and display consistently high standards of behaviour. The vast majority of pupils enjoy school and value the support of their teachers. This is reflected in the high standards of attendance. Pupils show considerable pride in their work and in their school uniform. They are active members of the school community and the vast majority participate in extra-curricular activities, such as sport or the choir.
- Teachers and pupils work with groups such as local democratic services to develop an understanding of democracy and key stage 2 pupils took part in a school election following the general election. The school council is given opportunities to explore their concerns and areas for improvement and, in discussion, pupils said that they felt valued and that adults listened to their views. Pupils' self-esteem is increased by opportunities to take on responsibility as members of the eco council, sports leaders or in supporting younger pupils.
- Leaders carefully diagnose the requirements of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. These pupils made extremely good progress in reading and mathematics in 2016 and their current progress in school remains strong. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils that reached the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at key stage 2 in 2016 was above that for other pupils nationally. Disadvantaged pupils are currently making good progress in the majority of year groups and differences in attainment are also diminishing. The most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, made above-average progress in 2016 and achieved levels of greater depth in writing and mathematics that were above those seen nationally. Current pupils are making stronger progress in reading, although they are not challenged as thoroughly in science, geography and history.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- further develop subject leadership and strengthen the curriculum so that standards in subjects such as science, geography and history match those in English and mathematics
- build upon actions to intensify challenge and further accelerate pupils' progress, particularly for the most able pupils.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Stockton-on-Tees. 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 four phase and subject leaders. I held a meeting with a group of pupils and talked to pupils less formally in lessons. I met six members of the governing body, including the chair and the vice-chair. I talked to the senior local authority adviser and the school development partner. I also held a telephone conversation with the assistant director of education. I undertook observations of learning with you and 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 documents relating to pupil tracking. I examined safeguarding documents, including the single central record of security and suitability checks on staff. I took into account 59 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 33 free-text responses from parents and carers. I also took into account 105 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire and 18 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.