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Mrs Claire Park
Headteacher
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Dear Claire Park

Short inspection of The Village Primary

Following my visit to the school on 19 July 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Although you have only been in post for just over a year, you have accomplished much. You have energised the staff team, which is excited by your vision and shares your passion to ensure that every pupil reaches their potential. You have also recruited and appointed your senior leadership team to ensure that the school has the capacity to move forwards at the brisk pace that you have determined. Collectively, you form a highly effective leadership team that understands what makes good quality teaching, learning and assessment.

In the short time you have been in post, you have gained an accurate view of the school's effectiveness. Your detailed school improvement plan identifies appropriate areas for improvement and sets ambitious targets against which you evaluate your success. It is a testimony to your determined leadership that you have already analysed pupils' outcomes for this year to inform your priorities for the forthcoming academic year.

You have sustained the good quality of teaching across the school and have put strong and successful measures in place to hold teachers to account for the achievement of pupils in their class. Teachers have welcomed the very clear direction and high expectations you provide. They have successfully risen to the challenges you have given them. You have tackled any teachers' underperformance sensitively and supportively but have not compromised pupils' achievements in doing so. Consequently, pupils make good progress from their starting points and

achieve well.

Both you and the deputy headteacher have implemented a rigorous, detailed approach to assessment of pupils' learning that all staff understand. You check pupils' progress at regular intervals throughout the year to ensure that all pupils are making good progress. This ensures that any underperformance is quickly identified and additional support or intervention strategies are implemented to ensure that no pupil is left behind. This has secured the good progress of pupils across the school effectively.

An important part of your work has been to develop a curriculum that supports your inspiring school ethos of 'explore, dream, discover'. You have introduced philosophy into the curriculum as a subject, as a means of encouraging pupils to have, and to express, opinions confidently. Pupils are encouraged to be proud of their local heritage and understand the roles they play in looking after our world. For example, Year 6 pupils were seen to be engrossed in researching global warming and discussing with each other the emotional impact of some of the statistics.

Governors share your pride in the school and are equally determined to improve the school's overall effectiveness and to raise pupils' achievement further. Governors closely monitor the impact of spending and, in particular, the use of the pupil premium grant. They frequently ask probing questions and receive detailed, evaluative information about pupils' progress. Governors have been hugely supportive of the changes you have implemented, while ensuring that the school continues to improve through robust and challenging dialogue and debate.

Parents recognise and appreciate your strong and purposeful leadership. Those that responded to Parent View, the Ofsted inspection questionnaire, are overwhelmingly supportive of your leadership. I also spoke to several parents during sports day. They were equally positive about the changes you have made and the confidence they have in your leadership. The improvement in pupils' progress and achievements pay testament to their well-founded confidence.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have worked successfully with leaders and governors to ensure that statutory checks are undertaken on the suitability of staff to work with children. Staff have up-to-date, accurate knowledge of current safeguarding requirements, because of the regular training you provide. Such is your vigilance in keeping children safe that you have added a standing agenda item to the weekly staff briefing for safeguarding. You have also re-written the staff code of conduct to make explicit each member of staff's safeguarding responsibilities. Consequently, safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Pupils say that they feel safe and that teachers help them to be safe. They are confident to talk with staff and willingly engage with visitors. They say that bullying rarely happens and that if it does occur, staff quickly and effectively deal with it. Pupils were able to explain in detail how to keep themselves safe when using the

internet and expressed the need to be vigilant.

Inspection findings

- Children start school with skills that are typically below that which you would expect, particularly in the area of learning associated with communication and language. Boys frequently start school with skills below those of girls. Historically, such differences have remained and by the end of Reception class, fewer boys have achieved a good level of development compared to that of girls. Your appointment of an early years leader in 2016 changed that. Staff now use assessment information effectively to plan curriculum activities carefully, so that they meet the needs and interests of children, particularly those of boys. Current assessment information indicates that, overall, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development has increased compared with 2016, and the differences between boys' and girls' outcomes has reduced well.
- Across the school, the difference in attainment between boys and girls, particularly in English, is something you had identified early in your headship as an area of concern and something we agreed as a focus for the inspection. You have introduced a raft of activities to actively engage boys in their learning, to try to encourage them to read more widely and to provide an exciting stimulus for writing. Your efforts have reaped rewards. For example, the boys only reading club, 'starbooks', and the 'Stephenson' project, which uses local heritage as a stimulus to write, are inspirational and effective in enticing boys into learning. Such actions are having a positive impact on overall pupils' outcomes and particularly the achievement of boys, which are now improving rapidly.
- A new approach to the teaching of reading is enabling pupils to develop their reading comprehension skills in a more structured way. Teachers carefully choose texts that will appeal to boys and girls. This is helping to strengthen pupils' achievement in reading. Provisional assessment information on pupils' achievements at the end of key stage 2 indicates strong improvement upon the outcomes seen in 2016. Particularly impressive is the achievement of boys. Initial information suggests that the proportion of boys reaching the expected standard has doubled compared to last year. The good quality phonics teaching that pupils receive underpins this.
- Your detailed analysis of assessment information about pupils' achievements has recognised that although pupils' outcomes in writing were above average overall, there were some inconsistencies, particularly for boys and for pupils reaching the high standard. You have established a highly structured approach to writing that builds skills progressively and has a strong link to pupils' reading development. Pupils are given very clear guidance against which they can self-assess their work and begin to improve without overreliance on their teacher. Pupils now understand what it means to have a purpose to write and the skills with which to be successful writers. Although this has not led to the improvements you had hoped for overall, it has helped the most able pupils and most able disadvantaged pupils to reach the highest standards in their learning.
- Across the school, leaders' detailed and precise analysis of pupils' outcomes are used to plan learning that has secured pupils' good progress. Swift intervention

for all groups of pupils, particularly underachieving boys, means that the vast majority of pupils are reaching at least the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics. However, you know that there remains some variability in the proportion of pupils, particularly the most able and disadvantaged most-able pupils, making the faster progress needed to reach the highest possible standards.

- Pupils are well behaved and demonstrate courtesy towards one another and adults. They conduct themselves in a friendly and orderly manner both inside the classrooms and around the school. Relationships are strong as pupils know that teachers have their best interests at heart. Pupils are positive learners and are keen to discuss their work with one another.
- Above average proportions of pupils are disadvantaged or have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Your detailed monitoring of their individual needs and progress means that any dips in achievement are addressed swiftly and effectively. Consequently, despite your concerns regarding the overall attendance for these groups of pupils, you are minimising the impact of some higher rates of absence on their progress, which remains good.
- You have a dedicated educational welfare officer for the school and together you analyse individual pupils' attendance carefully. You know the reasons why every pupil is absent from school and you are working to minimise any barriers that pupils may face. If there is a concern, you take measured, yet wise and prompt, action to provide guidance and support to pupils and their families. Despite these prompt actions, there has been a slight decline in the school's overall attendance rates for the current year. Individual case studies show that, as a result of your actions, the attendance of pupils from some families who are experiencing significant challenges in their lives has improved significantly. While this is heartening, you recognise that there is more to do so that all pupils, no matter their circumstances, can achieve their best and attend as regularly as possible.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- increasing proportions of pupils, particularly the most able and disadvantaged most able, are challenged to make the fastest possible progress in their learning
- pupils' attendance, particularly that of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, continues to improve.

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 local authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Diane Buckle
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

As part of the inspection, I explored the actions taken by leaders to increase the proportion of pupils making the fastest possible progress needed to achieve high standards of attainment. I also looked at the progress of key groups of pupils, especially in English and particularly boys. I checked the effectiveness of leaders' actions to improve attendance, especially for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils who are entitled to the additional government pupil premium funding. I also checked the actions that have been put in place to ensure that pupils are safe and kept safe and the procedures for managing the behaviour of pupils.

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders. I also met with the chair of the governing body. I met with the local authority's adviser who works with the school. I spoke with pupils during lessons and around the school as well as holding a formal meeting with boys from Reception to Year 6 and listening to them read. I took account of the information contained within the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaires for pupils, parents and staff. I visited classrooms to observe pupils' learning and looked at their work in books. I reviewed information about pupils' progress, attainment and attendance. I scrutinised the school's written self-evaluation of their work and leaders' action plans. I also looked at safeguarding documentation and strategies, including evaluating the impact of the school's procedures and policies to keep pupils safe, their recruitment checks and record keeping of children at risk of harm.