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Mr Peter Speck
Fulwell Junior School
Sea Road
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Dear Mr Speck

No formal designation inspection of Fulwell Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 26 September 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about aspects of the effectiveness of leadership and management, safeguarding and the behaviour and welfare of pupils at the school.

Evidence

The inspector scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. He met with the headteacher and other leaders, the chair of the governing body and three other governors, a group of pupils and a representative of the local authority. The inspector visited lessons with the headteacher to look at pupils' attitudes to learning and observed pupils' behaviour and the quality of supervision at social times. The inspector also looked at assessment information, a number of pupils' books, records of behaviour and bullying incidents, the school's plans for improvement and external reviews of the school undertaken by the local authority.

Having considered the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

Fulwell Junior School is larger than the average-sized primary school with around 360 pupils on roll. Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is below average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average. The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics at the end of key stage 2. The school appointed a new headteacher in January 2015 following a short period in which the school was led by an acting headteacher.

Safeguarding

Leaders ensure that pupils are safe and that a culture of vigilance is maintained. Thorough and systematic checks are made on all adults who work in or visit the school. Leaders also ensure that all members of staff are trained in safeguarding and regularly briefed to ensure that they understand the duty upon them to protect children from harm. Leaders and governors periodically review and amend safeguarding policies and practices, as necessary. Although leaders deal with relatively few child protection cases, they act quickly and involve external agencies and parents appropriately to achieve a swift resolution. The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of good quality.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The standard of pupils' behaviour in lessons and at social times is excellent. Pupils are extremely polite and respectful of one another. They behave calmly around the school site, and look after the school site impeccably. In lessons, pupils show enjoyment as teachers are good at making learning activities interesting and fun. Pupils are keen to participate and take part enthusiastically in practical activities and group work. They also eagerly speak up in lessons and many give thoughtful, extended answers to the teacher's questions. In each classroom visited during the inspection, pupils showed respect for the teacher's authority and relationships were very positive.

Last year, leaders undertook a wide-ranging consultation on the behaviour management policy because they wanted to ensure that there was greater consistency of approach. Leaders carefully considered the views of pupils in the process. Following the consultation, all members of staff have agreed and implemented the new policy. Leaders have also implemented a programme based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has helped staff and pupils develop their understanding of rights and responsibilities. Under this approach, each class has drawn up a classroom charter which has helped to further improve behaviour. A similar playground charter, also written by the pupils, is contributing to the excellent behaviour at social times. These approaches, together

with the wider programme of learning to foster pupils' personal, social, health and economic understanding, are making a positive contribution to pupils' understanding of British values and preparing them well for life in modern Britain.

Pupils feel safe. They describe teachers as friendly, kind and helpful and they trust teachers and other adults to sort out any concerns they have. For example, the younger pupils who feel worried or vulnerable are encouraged to write down what is troubling them and to feed their worry to the 'worry-monster'. The approach allows teachers to check on the well-being of pupils and to intervene and provide support where it is required. Pupils also report little bullying and feel confident that members of staff would act quickly to sort it out. Most respondents to the school's recent parent and pupil surveys agree that the school deals effectively with bullying. Nevertheless, a few parents have felt unhappy with leaders' response to bullying concerns. Checks on records of bullying and behaviour incidents show that leaders have thorough systems in place to monitor the relatively few incidents that do happen and that they make strenuous efforts to resolve problems, involving parents throughout.

Leadership and management

Following his appointment in January 2015, the headteacher identified some weaknesses in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. He also noted that rates of progress in English and mathematics had been variable from year to year. A review of teaching by the local authority also highlighted variability in the quality of teaching at the time. As a result, the headteacher stepped up the level of checks and challenged some teachers to 'up their game' and to do things differently. Some teachers were initially resistant to some of the changes leaders wanted to implement.

Across this period, the governors also increased the frequency of their monitoring and meetings to hold leaders to account. Their thorough systems for checking on pupils' progress and the quality of teaching presented a robust challenge to leaders at all levels. A further external review by the local authority later that year confirmed that progress was being made. The overall quality of teaching had improved and there was an increasing proportion of high-quality practice. Teachers who needed help had responded positively to support.

Governors have maintained a high level of scrutiny and monitor the impact of leaders' work tightly. This has placed considerable pressure on the headteacher, who at times has felt unsupported in making the necessary changes. He is a reflective practitioner and accepts that he did not consult staff widely enough when making changes to teaching and learning policies, and that this caused frayed relationships with some members of staff. He has benefited considerably from the guidance he has received from the chair of the governing body and has adopted a more consultative approach. Following this difficult period, relationships in the school at all levels are now very positive. Leaders hold an accurate evaluation of the

school's many strengths and know where there are weaknesses. Improvement plans are suitably detailed and leaders and governors use them effectively to move the school forward. The senior leadership team communicates priorities clearly and provides members of staff with good support to achieve the school's objectives.

The headteacher continues to implement changes in order to fully meet the raised expectations of the national curriculum. New assessment systems have been introduced, following the removal of national curriculum levels, and these are now well embedded and used effectively. Teachers work in groups of three to develop aspects of teaching and learning, and leaders frequently visit lessons, identify good practice and share it through staff meetings and training sessions. Further well-considered changes have been introduced this September. The school has moved away from setting pupils by ability and has adopted a mixed-ability model. Teacher training has focused on ensuring that lesson planning meets the needs of pupils with different starting points and, in particular, the most able pupils are challenged sufficiently to make rapid progress. Teachers are on board with the changes and there is positive momentum to make sure that the new approaches are fully effective.

There are promising signs already. The provisional results of this summer's national curriculum tests at the end of key stage 2 show that many more pupils attained the higher standard in reading and mathematics than in the previous year. In 2017, over two thirds of pupils attained the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics, which was well above the national average. The most able pupils did much better than in 2016 and the gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and others in the school narrowed markedly. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities made strong progress because of the excellent support they received. The school's own assessment information for pupils currently in the school indicates that increasing proportions of pupils are on track to make strong progress and attain the higher standards at the end of Year 6. Nevertheless, published data about the school's performance in recent years indicates that rates of progress in English and mathematics have been no better than average. Scrutiny of the work in pupils' books, however, shows that pupils do make strong and sustained progress. Teachers hold high expectations and challenge pupils effectively. Pupils take real pride in the presentation of their work and develop very good handwriting skills. The quality of their work improves rapidly over time. Pupils regularly draw upon their knowledge of mathematics to solve problems and develop confidence in handling number. Pupils told the inspector that they enjoy the work set for them and find it challenging.

External support

The quality of support from the local authority has been variable. Following the appointment of the headteacher in 2015, its work to review the quality of teaching in the school was helpful in highlighting some weaknesses that had developed since the previous inspection. Evidence confirmed the headteacher's own evaluation and

challenged the widely held view that the school was providing an outstanding standard of education.

However, a more recent review of leadership and management was unbalanced and overly focused on the performance of the headteacher. It caused considerable stress and risked destabilising leadership at a time when good progress was being made in tackling identified weaknesses.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that governors maintain a healthy balance of support, challenge and guidance for the headteacher and other leaders, in order to secure outstanding rates of progress for pupils.
- Ensure that a wide range of evidence on pupils' progress is used when holding teachers and leaders to account for their performance.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector