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Mrs Ashleigh Sheridan  
Headteacher  
Ribbon School  
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County Durham  
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Dear Mrs Sheridan

### **Short inspection of Ribbon School**

Following my visit to the school on 10 October 2017 with Ofsted Inspector Jim Hannah, 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 April 2013.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You took up your new role as headteacher in January 2017. Since then you have made significant and effective changes to the school to ensure that it continues to improve. Your analysis of how the school is doing and what you and your team need to do to improve it further is ambitious, realistic and brave. You have reshaped the senior team and made changes to the structure of the curriculum. You have worked very effectively to establish and maintain a culture at the school where cooperation and openness, high expectations and high-quality learning are practised and celebrated.

The school's previous inspection in April 2013 identified the need to ensure that the expectations that all staff have of what pupils can and should do remain high. It cited the sharing of good and outstanding teaching as an element of maintaining and further extending expectations for all. Your successful work in reshaping the curriculum so that staff focus more carefully on the individual needs of every pupil has encouraged a significant amount of sharing among staff, with colleagues learning from each other's work. Your reshaping of the senior team, with effective support from officers of Durham local authority, with its emphasis on inclusion and the monitoring of the quality and influence of teaching, has further improved team-working and raised expectations across the school.

You are realistic about what still needs to be done to improve reading and the

development of pupils' mathematical skills. You have worked carefully to improve the quality and status of reading in and out of school. The well-stocked library has been augmented by an attractive reading zone at the heart of the school. You have introduced whole-class reading sessions, harder books to stretch pupils and develop their vocabulary and more focus on the ways writers use writing to create conscious effects. These initiatives are having a positive impact on pupils' skills and delight in reading. They are also having a positive impact on pupils' own writing and their ability to read, interpret and solve the verbal mathematical problems that are a key element of the mathematics curriculum.

The governing body knows the school and the local community very well. Since your appointment, governors have worked closely with you to refocus and improve the school. They make detailed checks on the school's work through regular focused visits and follow-up discussion. Governors evaluate the impact of leaders' actions and provide challenge that helps ensure that the school keeps on track. You provide the governing body with detailed information. Governors use this information and their own direct knowledge of the school to check progress and analyse the impact of your actions. Governors also draw on a range of effective external expertise from officers of Gateshead and Durham local authorities.

A large majority of the parents and carers with whom I spoke, and the large proportion who respond to the school's regular questionnaires for parents, are supportive of the school. They are particularly complimentary about the leadership and the way you engage and seek parents' views. They reported that communication is a particular strength. They know that they can contact the school with any concerns and that these would be promptly addressed. Parents are confident that their children are happy, safe and well taught.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You, your staff and the governing body take safeguarding responsibilities very seriously. There is a culture of safeguarding at the school. There is regular and effective training for all staff and governors to ensure that they are up to date in their knowledge and understanding. You, as designated safeguarding lead, have strong links with outside agencies. Your records of engagement with these agencies are detailed and show your meticulous approach to this aspect of the school's work. You engage with the local authority promptly and follow safeguarding issues through effectively.

You and your leadership team have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are detailed and of high quality.

### **Inspection findings**

- Children settle well when they enter Ribbon early years. This is because the early years leader establishes clear and open links with parents, and staff are very carefully and well deployed. Communication between home and school is good. There is also clear and detailed communication between the Ribbon early years team and other local nursery providers. This means that children get off to a

flying start at school. They are happy and safe and increasingly independent, and yet aware of others. The learning environment, both inside and out, is stimulating and attractive. Staff are skilled in ensuring that children develop their independence as learners who enjoy exploring the world.

- The proportion of children who achieve a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year has improved significantly over the last three years and is now above average. This is because the early years leader and her staff are expert in using their knowledge of what children can and cannot yet do to sharpen their planning and focus their teaching. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged and most-able children, who are making particularly good progress.
- The teaching of phonics is a strength. The proportion of pupils who achieved the required standard in the Year 1 screening check has been similar to or better than the national average over the last four years. The new school-wide focus on reading is having an impact in key stage 1. The most able pupils in this key stage said that they enjoy reading and discussing the ways the writer uses words and patterns of words to create effects for the reader. The least able pupils in key stage 1 are able to use their phonics skills to read new words correctly.
- Most pupils make good progress through key stage 1 from their starting points. Through your reshaped team, you ensure that staff monitor the progress of pupils carefully and use the information they gather to focus their teaching on best meeting pupils' needs. You do this through regular visits to classrooms and meetings with staff to discuss pupils' progress. As a result, the quality of teaching across all subjects continues to improve. In addition, pupils are taking more responsibility for their own learning as they move through key stage 1. For example, there is clear evidence that pupils are editing and improving their own writing as they respond to staff comments.
- There is clear evidence that you and your staff's ongoing work to improve the depth of pupils' mathematical understanding across the school is working. This is particularly the case in key stage 2, where there were gaps in some pupils' mathematical knowledge due to weak teaching in the past. I saw evidence of pupils wrestling with complex problems and, through deft questioning, staff challenging and encouraging them to find a way to a solution. Mathematics books contain evidence of pupils really thinking through knotty real-life problems and making links between cause and effect, often demonstrating the logic of their thinking through the use of key words like 'because'.
- I saw many examples of staff expertise in the use of questioning to extend and deepen pupils' thinking, often at a cracking pace. I saw staff using a combination of persistence and kindness to stretch pupils' understanding by asking questions that enquire about 'why' and 'how' rather than the more mundane 'what'. For example, in a Year 6 English lesson, the teacher, realising that not all the pupils had quite grasped the purpose of a key aspect of their work, stopped the activity. She expertly checked for understanding through targeted questioning that explained and reinforced what pupils needed to do. Refocused and invigorated, the pupils went back to their work.
- You monitor the progress and well-being of pupils who have special educational

needs and/or disabilities carefully. Expectations for these pupils are high. As a result, they make generally good progress from their starting points. You have put in place carefully targeted support for these pupils, which uses an appropriate combination of effective classroom teaching and, where appropriate, additional out-of-class support. Communication systems between classroom and additional support staff are good and mean that these pupils have access to the full range of the curriculum suited to their needs. In addition, you have worked effectively to ensure that the attendance of these pupils is carefully monitored so that they do not miss out on valuable learning time.

- Pupils told me that they are safe, feel safe and know how to stay safe. They told me that there is regular training at school that helps them keep themselves safe in a range of situations, including when online. They said that they knew about and were alert to the range of forms that bullying can take and what to do if it happened to them or to a friend. They said that they would tell an adult and that they were very confident that adults at the school would deal with any bullying promptly and well.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils across the school continue to have more opportunities to extend their mathematical skills, fluency and knowledge by solving real-life problems
- reading continues to be a key focus of the school's work so that pupils take a real delight in reading and are increasingly able to apply their reading skills to a wide range of texts.

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

Mark Evans  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with groups of parents at the beginning of the day. I met with you and your deputy to discuss the school's effectiveness and what you have done since your appointment to ensure that the school continues to improve. I also met with three assistant headteachers, one of whom leads on the support the school gives to pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. I met with the early years leader and also with the chair of the trust. I also met with your school improvement partner who helps assure the quality of your work.

I read a range of documents, including your evaluation of the school's effectiveness.

I also scrutinised the school's safeguarding systems, records and associated documents. I checked information about pupils' achievement along with evaluations of aspects of the school's work and minutes of meetings of the governing body.

My colleague, Jim Hannah, and I visited all classes to observe teaching, learning and assessment. We checked pupils' progress in their books. We talked formally with groups of pupils from Years 4 and 6. We also talked informally with pupils in lessons and around the school at lunch and playtimes.

Jim Hannah enjoyed listening to and discussing reading with pupils from Year 2.

I considered 36 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View), 31 free-text comments and 17 responses from staff to their online questionnaire.