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Mrs Mairi Calderwood
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Calderwood

Short inspection of Stanhope Primary and Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 23 January 2018, 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 June 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

You became headteacher at the start of this academic year and have quickly assessed the many strengths of the school. You have written an action plan that identifies accurately those aspects that you need to improve. This sets ambitious targets and well-considered actions to bring rapid improvement. You and the other staff have not wasted time and are busy making a most positive start. Pupils' progress, where it was not fast enough, has already begun to improve. The proportion of pupils who are reaching the national expectations for their age is increasing as a result.

Nevertheless, you recognise that these are early days and that work needs to continue as it has not yet had the longer-term impact you want. You and the staff have high expectations and are determined that all provision will be of the highest quality. Your enthusiasm for the school and your job is palpable. It has spread to senior and middle leaders, and outwards to other staff. Staff morale is high, and many parents are complimentary of the new energy within the school. They approve of your visible presence at the school gates each day. They welcome your desire to listen and take note of the opinions of others.

This positivity has also had a considerable impact on pupils. Pupils I met were keen

to tell me how much they enjoyed their lessons. Their workbooks show that teachers give them effective guidance to improve their work. They also have good opportunities to understand how mathematics can help them in their day-to-day lives. For example, as part of their work on healthy eating, pupils in Year 1 learn about the shapes they can find in the foods they eat. Pupils in Year 6 learn how to divide restaurant bills in different ways so a bill can be shared. You and the staff also ensure that children develop a deep love of books. Almost every child I spoke with during my visit told me how much he or she enjoyed reading, and many enthusiastically named their favourite books. Pupils say that the time that teachers share a book with them is among their favourite times of the day. The impact of staff's work to ignite in pupils a genuine desire to read and treasure books of all kinds is a strength of the school.

You are aware that leaders have not dealt effectively with all the areas identified for improvement from the previous inspection report. A range of measures have raised the attendance level of pupils overall so that it is now close to the national average. The absence of disadvantaged pupils, however, remains too high. It was in the highest 10% of all schools nationally during the preceding two years, and this year has even worsened slightly. The proportion of these pupils who are persistently absent has fallen considerably, along with that of other pupils in the school, but that also remains too high.

You found that the impact of spending of the pupil premium to support the academic progress of disadvantaged pupils last year was mixed. Quite rightly, you have now adjusted the support you provide for these pupils. The school's data shows that the achievement of disadvantaged pupils is now improving as a result. You are fully aware that leaders need to monitor this carefully, however, so that the rate of improvement does not slow over time.

The proportion of pupils who pass the phonics screening check in Year 1 has remained below the national average for four consecutive years. As a result, too many pupils have needed additional support in Year 2 in an attempt to catch up. The new early years leader, who is now the leader for phonics, is ambitious and determined for this to change. She has a good grasp of the knowledge pupils need to acquire through the academic year. Staff who teach phonics have attended training at another local school whose phonics teaching is effective. Phonics sessions are now lively and engaging, and pupils are keen to show what they can do. Nevertheless, you recognise that there is more work to do. For example, the weakest readers are not given books to read at home which are well matched to their skills. Sometimes staff miss occasions when children do not understand something or when they hold their pens incorrectly.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements meet requirements. Staff have been trained thoroughly in this aspect of their work, including in areas of recent national concern, such as extremism. As a result, they are knowledgeable and are vigilant for the many warning signs of potential abuse. They report

concerns to you quickly and records show that the school works effectively with a wide range of external agencies.

Staff record any accidental injuries to pupils that occur in school. For more serious incidents or bumped heads, for example, they give pupils a prominent red wristband to wear. These pupils take a detailed slip home so that parents are aware. All those who responded to Parent View believe that the school helps to keep their children safe. Pupils I met also told me how they feel very safe in school. They say that staff always sort out quickly the very small amount of unkindness and bullying that happens, and do so fairly. As one pupil explained, to the hearty agreement of others, 'You can trust the teachers with anything.'

Inspection findings

- Staff are working together and in a positive manner to provide the best possible education at Stanhope. The many staff who responded to Ofsted's staff questionnaire said that they appreciate your consideration of their well-being, that you treat them respectfully, and give them good training to improve.
- Half or more of pupils enter the early years with skills that are below those typical for their age in reading, writing, shape, space and measure, and in making relationships. In other areas of learning, most children's skills are broadly typical.
- The proportions of pupils overall reaching the expected standards at the end of key stage 1 and 2 are rising and close to those found nationally. Currently, smaller proportions than found nationally achieve a greater depth of understanding. Pupils make broadly average progress through key stage 2.
- Pupils like mathematics and they understand its importance for adults in a huge range of careers. They explained to me why it would be impossible to be a scientist, restaurant owner or an architect without it. Pupils showed how, for instance, an architect could use mathematics to calculate the extra building materials they would need for a tower block of eight storeys rather than five.
- A range of new incentives and rewards for pupils are helping to drive up their overall attendance. Pupils I met said they like coming to school and understood that this was important. Too many disadvantaged pupils, however, still do not attend school regularly enough. This contributes to their slower progress and lower attainment. You have made raising attendance a priority for improvement.
- Disadvantaged pupils are receiving more effective and precise academic support this year. As a result, their progress from their starting points is now accelerating. You have not yet checked that support is adjusted quickly enough when needed so that this improvement will be sustained.
- You agree that phonics teaching has not been sufficiently effective for some time. Weaker readers rely too much on picture clues or a word's context to try to compensate for their inability to read simple words. Phonics teaching is improving considerably. As a result, a greater proportion of pupils in Year 1 are on track to pass the phonics screening check this year. Leaders, however, have not yet ensured that the weakest readers receive teaching of consistently high quality. A

large majority of these pupils I heard read had books that were far too difficult for them. In addition, staff do not always notice when pupils make mistakes when they are reading or writing. Staff do not show them all how to hold their pens properly when using a whiteboard. As a result, some pupils do not write letters correctly.

- Staff give pupils good guidance on how to stay safe outside school. They told me how you and other teachers help them to understand not to give their personal details online. They also learn about the dangers of, for instance, roads and strangers.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers give the weakest readers books to read that are suitable for their ability, and teach phonics consistently and effectively, so that they catch up quickly
- teachers help all children to hold their pens or pencils appropriately, so that they can write neatly
- they check how effective the recent actions to accelerate the progress of disadvantaged pupils have been, so that the initial improvements in their achievement are sustained
- they focus on taking effective action to improve quickly the attendance of disadvantaged 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 Nottinghamshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Roary Pownall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met you and shared my lines of enquiry. I also met with members of the governing body, the deputy headteacher, the leader of the early years, the assistant headteacher for key stage 2, the subject leader for English and the inclusion leader. I considered the responses of parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and all free-text comments. I scrutinised the responses to Ofsted's questionnaires for staff. We visited classes together throughout the school and I looked at samples of pupils' work with you. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and met with a large group of them at breaktime. I viewed a range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school's current performance and its plans for further improvement. I considered a number of policy documents,

including those for safeguarding. I heard a number of children read. I examined the school's website to check that it meets requirements on the publication of specified information.