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22 February 2018

Mr Richard Linsley
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Richard Linsley

Short inspection of Alverton Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 7 February 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 May 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.**

The previous report challenged leaders to improve teaching and raise pupils' achievements further. Since your appointment as headteacher in 2015, you have tackled this challenge diligently. You and governors are justifiably proud of several demonstrable successes that you have accrued in terms of pupils' outcomes. The proportion of children in the early years reaching a good level of development has been sustained at above the national average over time. Pupils' outcomes in phonics in Year 1 have improved over time to match national averages. Overall, in reading, writing and mathematics, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standards in both key stage 1 and 2 has matched or exceeded national averages over time.

Leaders were asked to improve the quality of teaching and learning in writing, in particular, following the previous inspection. Subsequently, pupils' achievement in writing has risen steadily. You have, however, accurately recognised that leaders' actions to accelerate pupils' progress in English grammar, spelling and punctuation have been less effective. Pupils' work in books and the information that you shared with me show that rates of progress for current pupils continue to be variable across year groups. Your school improvement plan quite rightly includes this area of teaching and learning as a priority for improvement. English subject action plans, however, do not specify precisely how issues will be addressed.

You have correctly identified reading as an area requiring closer scrutiny. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils in key stage 2 reaching expected standards in reading has been lower than national averages over time. Differences between this group and other pupils nationally are not reducing, consistently. You and governors are dissatisfied by this outcome. Consequently, you have striven to raise the profile of reading across the school community. Subject leaders' monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning in reading across key stages, however, is irregular and not always focused on the correct priorities. In addition, improvement plans for English are not sufficiently well detailed to bring about improvement in the quality of teaching and learning in reading, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.

Pupils' outcomes in science in key stage 1 have been well above national averages over time. In key stage 2, outcomes have been more variable. Work in pupils' science books show that pupils' progress across year groups currently is inconsistent; the most able pupils in particular are not offered sufficient challenge in their tasks and learning. Leaders do not yet monitor or track teaching and learning in science in a reliable, effective manner. Subject improvement plans lack detail and are not well enough focused on developing teaching practices or improving pupils' outcomes.

Subject-specific monitoring and improvement planning are of variable quality. You recognise that some leaders need further support and development opportunities to improve their effectiveness in improving teaching and learning and raising pupils' outcomes. The development of middle leadership, including in English and science is, appropriately, another key priority on your whole-school improvement plan.

Recommendations from the previous report required you to raise pupils' attendance so that it at least matched national averages. The leadership team has been active in this regard, setting clear expectations, rewards and sanctions. You have worked closely with the local authority's prevention team and sought to involve parents and carers more promptly where issues of poor attendance arise. Records of attendance for current pupils show that overall attendance has improved slightly when compared to the school's figures from last year. Nevertheless, attendance remains below the national average and the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school is considerably higher than the national average. You and governors recognise the pressing need to rapidly reduce pupils' absences.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have made sure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You are absolute in your determination to ensure that all families and pupils receive the care, support and guidance that they need, including the most vulnerable. To this end, you and other leaders work closely with a wide range of external experts and agencies, such as speech therapists, the local authority's prevention team and social care partners. The needs of most families and pupils are, therefore, identified and addressed promptly. Pupils told me that they feel safe in this friendly school. All parents who responded to Ofsted's survey are confident

that their child is happy and well looked after at Alverton Primary.

The single central register of staff employment checks meets statutory requirements and is well maintained. You regularly train and update all staff on matters pertaining to child protection and safeguarding. Comprehensive training records ensure that you know precisely which members of staff have received training, the types of training that have taken place and when updates are due. As a result, staff are up to date in their knowledge and understanding. Staff and governors demonstrate appropriately vigilant 'it-could-happen-here' attitudes. All are confident in their ability to discuss their duties and responsibilities regarding the care and protection of pupils.

Inspection findings

- You have correctly identified English grammar, spelling and punctuation as a priority area for improvement. You are working hard to create an accurate system to track pupils' progress in this area of learning because information to date has been imprecise. Subject-specific action plans, however, do not indicate clearly how leaders will monitor or further improve the quality of teaching and learning in English grammar, spelling and punctuation. Currently, work in pupils' books demonstrates variable rates of progress across key stages. Age-appropriate spelling rules and grammatical conventions are not always taught systematically and so are not well embedded. Not all teachers address pupils' misconceptions in a consistent manner. As a result, pupils' outcomes have been disappointing over time. In key stage 2, for the last two years the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in English grammar, spelling and punctuation has remained below the national average.
- Some subject leaders are new to post and are still developing their skills of leadership and management. While leaders are keen to improve the quality of teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility, English and science are not yet monitored in a consistent or effective manner. This means that leaders do not know precisely where strengths and weaknesses lie across year groups and key stages. Consequently, improvement plans in each subject are not sufficiently focused on the correct priorities and lack the detail needed to inform strategic direction correctly.
- Leaders and governors are determined to diminish differences in reading outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. You have carefully targeted pupil premium funding to increase pupils' opportunities to read and to raise the profile of reading. Staff have revamped library areas, appointed pupil reading ambassadors and held various events to excite interest among pupils in books and reading. English improvement plans and monitoring procedures for reading, however, are not yet sharp enough to realise your ambition for disadvantaged pupils. Furthermore, pupils who read with me said that sometimes books and texts lack challenge: 'I like to find new, interesting words.' A small minority of pupils told me that they cannot find books that appeal to them in school and so rely on bringing books from home.
- Pupils enjoy science and said that they especially like investigations and practical

tasks. Leaders check teachers' planning to make sure that pupils in each key stage are experiencing their entitlement in terms of the required areas of scientific study. Pupils' books, however, show that pupils' progress from their different starting points in science is too variable across year groups. Work in books and the school's own information show that few pupils are currently reaching a greater depth of learning in science. In particular, teachers do not challenge the most able pupils sufficiently to think more deeply about their work and learning.

- You have rightly made attendance a key priority for improvement. In recent years, too many pupils have missed too much school. You work together with staff to help all parents and pupils to understand the importance of good school attendance in relation to later success in life. You issue rewards and sanctions in a consistent manner and have drawn on the support of the local authority's prevention team to support your efforts. There are signs that your tenacity is beginning to pay off. Overall attendance currently shows some improvement compared to previous years, and the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent has reduced slightly. Nonetheless, attendance figures are still not in line with national averages. You and governors recognise that there is further work to do.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' progress in English grammar, spelling and punctuation improves so that the proportion of pupils reaching or exceeding expected standards rises to, or at least meets, national averages
- subject leaders' improvement plans and monitoring processes are sufficiently well detailed and thorough to secure improvements in teaching and learning in English and science across key stages
- pupils, including the most able, make consistently good or better progress in science and differences for disadvantaged pupils, in terms of reading outcomes, reduce
- pupils' attendance improves and the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school reduces to at least match national figures.

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

Yours sincerely

Fiona Manuel
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I spent time with you and your deputy headteacher. We jointly observed teaching, learning and assessment in classes across the school. I scrutinised work in pupils' books, spoke with pupils from each key stage and listened to pupils read. No pupils responded to Ofsted's survey. I reviewed school documentation and information, including policies, assessment information, monitoring files and your school improvement plans. I met with a representative from the local authority. I also met governors, including the chair of the governing body. I talked with parents at the school entrance, taking account of the 39 free-text comments and the 46 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I spoke with members of staff during the inspection, including subject and middle leaders and considered the views of 19 members of staff who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire.