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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Lesley Martin
Headteacher
Stanhope Primary School
Gresford Street
South Shields
Tyne and Wear
NE33 4SZ

Dear Mrs Martin

Short inspection of Stanhope Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 15 March 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.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since you and your deputy took up post in September 2016, you have gained the respect of parents, carers and staff and taken steps to improve the school. This has been difficult, however, as you have had to contest with a significant budget deficit, which has hindered your ability to make changes. You and the governing body are currently in the process of completing a full review of the staffing structure, required to secure a sound financial position going forward. Although this is a challenging process for everyone, there is now light at the end of the tunnel, in part because the local authority has been particularly supportive. Although hampered by financial issues, you have pressed on and done much to improve aspects of teaching and assessment.

Outcomes at the end of key stage 2 have fluctuated somewhat in recent years. In 2015 and 2016, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics was broadly in line with that seen nationally. Weaknesses in writing, which your predecessor was asked to improve following the last inspection, had been addressed. Since then, pupils have made consistently more progress in writing than that seen nationally. You continue to ensure that pupils have many opportunities to write at length and for a wide range of different purposes. However, standards of attainment at the end of key stage 2 dipped last year, especially in reading, in which only around half of pupils in Year 6 met the expected standard. Your analysis of why this happened identified that a number of pupils underperformed because they faced personal problems during the period when they sat national curriculum tests. You have introduced a number of approaches to help more vulnerable pupils cope, including

the 'mindfulness moment room', which provides a calming and peaceful space for pupils to discuss their worries with a skilled member of staff.

The school's last inspection also identified some weaknesses in the quality of early years provision. At that time, inspectors identified that adults were not meeting children's needs well enough, which was important because many children enter the Nursery with skills below those typical for their age. Strong and effective leadership, since then, has improved the rate of progress children make in the Nursery and Reception. Last year, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year was above the national average, and your own assessment information is showing that this picture is likely to be sustained this year.

Parents who spoke to me and those who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire are supportive of the school and the quality of education provided. They pointed to the significant improvements in sporting opportunities and the better support now in place for more vulnerable pupils. They said that you and your teachers are very approachable and quick to respond to any concerns they have. I found behaviour to be good throughout the day, and pupils told me that this is typically the case. Levels of attendance are well above those seen in primary schools nationally, and few pupils miss school regularly.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You conducted a thorough audit of safeguarding arrangements when you took up post and have been meticulous in ensuring that all members of staff are suitably trained. You have well-developed systems in place for staff to record any concerns they identify, and you act quickly and decisively when a child is at risk of harm. This includes doggedly pursuing the referrals you make to the local authority and checking on the whereabouts of pupils whose families leave the area.

You are well supported by the experienced safeguarding governor who regularly checks the school's procedures.

Records show that bullying in the school is relatively rare. Pupils who have any concerns can share them easily through the school's worry boxes. Pupils told me that they trust any adult to help them resolve any difficulties they have.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, I wanted to find out what leaders are doing to ensure that pupils make the best possible progress, particularly in reading, as outcomes at the end of key stage 2 fell below those seen nationally last year. I also wanted to see whether the school has secured improvements in the quality of early years provision.
- I found that improving pupils' attainment in reading is a key priority in the school development plan. As a result, I found that teachers in each phase of the school

are actively fostering enjoyment in books and improving the way reading is taught. The school library has been improved and is stocked with a good range of books suitable for all ages and abilities, including the most able and avid readers. The school's leader of English described her mission as 'ensuring the school is drenched in a love of reading'. New and engaging class novels have been purchased, covering modern and classic literature. Teachers are actively introducing new and more exciting vocabulary. Reading homework tasks are set regularly, and pupils are encouraged to read often through the school's 'reading challenge' programme. I saw more-advanced reading skills being taught effectively in key stage 2. Pupils are guided to think deeply about the texts they read and to infer greater meaning by considering the author's use of language. Pupils showed great interest and were keen to participate fully as they read and discussed books together in small groups. The pupils I listened to enjoyed reading and read with confidence. The school's most up-to-date assessments show that a high proportion of pupils currently in the school, including those who are disadvantaged, are making good progress in reading. Nevertheless, your efforts to improve outcomes in reading need to be sustained to ensure that pupils have the necessary skills to be successful at secondary school.

- Pupils are also making good progress in other national curriculum subjects. They take pride in their work and many develop mature handwriting. Pupils are highly productive in lessons and show determination to keep the quality of their work high. Your assessment information shows that disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are also making good progress across different subjects. You acknowledge, however, that pupils need to develop a wider range of skills in mathematics. Although the vast majority of pupils demonstrate secure arithmetic skills, they are less skilled in applying their knowledge to solving mathematical problems.
- The quality of early years provision has improved markedly since the last inspection. The early years leader has used her clear philosophy and knowledge of child development to improve the skills of other staff in the unit. Observations of children are now frequent and well recorded. Children's 'learning journeys' are supplemented with excellent records of their work, which provide valuable evidence of children's progress over time. Learning activities are well matched to children's needs. Children who have SEN and/or disabilities are identified quickly and specialist help is provided. The early years pupil premium funding is used well and ensures that disadvantaged children attain as well as other children. Adult-led activities to teach phonics and to develop basic writing and number skills are carefully balanced with informal play opportunities. The outdoor space has been improved significantly, and the forest school makes a positive contribution to children's development. These changes have brought about a steady improvement in outcomes, as children now make strong progress.
- With an improving financial position, the school is well placed to move forwards. You have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses and good systems in place to check on the school's effectiveness. The improvements made to the way that the school assesses pupils' progress have ensured that teachers are clear about pupils' next steps in learning. Those who fall behind are now quickly provided with extra help. Ambitious targets have been set for the end of

each key stage, and teachers know exactly what is expected of them. You have begun to make more effective use of middle leaders, although their role still needs further development, as they have limited opportunity to evaluate whether their actions are having the necessary effect. Governors, too, are well informed and ambitious, but a number of vacancies on the governing body mean that their capacity to provide comprehensive scrutiny of the school's work is limited. For example, they accept that they need to be more rigorous in checking how effectively the pupil premium is spent.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- standards of attainment in reading improve to, and at least match, those seen nationally at the end of key stage 2
- teachers provide more opportunities for pupils to hone their reasoning and problem-solving skills in mathematics
- the roles of middle leaders and governors are developed further, so that they contribute more to evaluating the school's effectiveness.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you and the deputy headteacher, the early years leader, a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body, and a representative of the local authority. I also met with a group of pupils and listened to some of them read. Together, you and I visited lessons in each phase of the school to look at the effect of your work to develop the quality of teaching. During lesson visits, I sampled pupils' books and talked to pupils about their learning and progress. The English and mathematics leaders and the deputy headteacher looked in detail at some pupils' work with me, in order to evaluate the progress pupils had made over time. I also walked around the school to look at pupils' behaviour and conduct at social times. I looked at the 12 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the school's own survey of parents' opinions. I looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, policies and other information available on the school website. I focused particularly on the progress of pupils currently in key stage 2, especially in English and mathematics, and the school's strategy for

teaching reading. I looked closely at the effectiveness of early years provision and at the capacity of leaders, including the governors, to improve the school further and keep pupils safe.