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Miss Beverley Jones
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Dear Miss Jones

Short inspection of Easington Colliery Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 27 March 2018 with Deborah Ashcroft, Her Majesty's Inspector, 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 September 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 your arrival in January 2018, you have worked with your team to consolidate good practice and build upon the improvements in outcomes evident in 2017. You have carried out reviews of core safeguarding and health and safety practices and reviewed financial stability. You have worked with senior leaders to develop an accurate view of current standards and aligned this to the school improvement plan. In addition, you have worked with staff to review their performance management targets to link them more closely to school improvement priorities.

You have reviewed your leadership structure to increase the capacity to address areas of focus. You recognised that some senior leaders had a significant weight of responsibilities and have provided support through the appointment of an additional assistant headteacher from Easter 2018. This role will provide an even stronger focus upon the provision and progress of disadvantaged pupils, to ensure that the improvements in progress in 2017 are matched by further improvements in attainment. A number of staff are also involved in accredited leadership training to further strengthen middle leadership across the school. You and your team hold detailed meetings with staff to ensure that they account for the progress of the pupils in their classes. It is clear from conversations with a wide range of staff, and from staff responses to questionnaires, that they value their opportunities for

professional development and that they feel well led by you and your leadership team.

Your team, and that of your predecessor, have addressed many of the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. Teachers commented upon increased opportunities to share good practice, including new approaches to teaching writing and mathematics, with their colleagues. Pupils' outcomes in spelling, punctuation and grammar tests have risen to standards that are in line with those seen nationally, although pupils do not consistently integrate these skills into their extended writing. Outcomes in mathematics have improved, with pupils making good progress and achieving standards in line with those seen nationally. You have recently revised both the school improvement plans and recalibrated teachers' performance management targets to build in heightened expectations for progress.

Your leadership team has a number of important strengths. During the inspection, senior leaders showed an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching. Your special educational needs coordinator oversees high-quality provision. Both within the classroom and in the enhanced mainstream provision, specialist support equips pupils with key social skills while ensuring full access to the wider curriculum. Additional sensory therapy for pupils offers further specialist care that is finely attuned to pupils' needs. Your welfare team provide extensive support to pupils and families that has secured good and improving rates of attendance and positive behaviour. Your team provide well-tailored support to pupils at risk of exclusion from up to 21 schools and have achieved considerable success in reintegrating these pupils back into school. The theme of inclusion runs through all aspects of the school's work and it is a value that is deeply held by your staff at all levels. Your team's work on inclusion has been rightly commended and much of their work to provide effective special educational needs provision is exemplary. In addition, leaders have continued to improve teaching, provision and assessment in the early years. This has contributed to increasing proportions of children achieving a good level of development and a pattern of consistent improvement over a four-year period.

You and your team are developing the roles of middle leaders. In addition to formal leadership training, they are enhancing their effectiveness by taking a more active role in providing training for colleagues to further improve outcomes in English and mathematics. The actions of English leaders have contributed to good progress in reading and attainment that is now broadly in line with that seen nationally at the expected standard. However, their actions to improve standards in writing have been less successful and new expectations are not being implemented with enough consistency. Mathematics leaders are exploring new schemes of learning and providing colleagues with resources and strategies to enable them to work with pupils at greater depth of understanding. On occasions, these changes are not being implemented with enough pace, and systems to measure their effect on pupils' progress are not sufficiently developed.

You have commissioned a review of governance to ensure that governors have increasing capacity to provide you with the support and challenge to sustain further

improvement. Governors are carrying out an audit of their skills to match their interests and aptitudes more closely to their areas of responsibility. Governors are committed to the ethos of the school and the chair of the governing body has regular updates with you on many aspects of the school's work. Systems to track the current progress of pupils do not consistently provide governors and leaders with information in a timely enough manner.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders make thorough checks on the suitability of adults working at the school. Leaders and teaching staff are continually mindful of pupils' welfare. They pursue concerns over pupils' safety vigorously and record them thoroughly. Staff at the school have developed strong links with families and external agencies to promote pupils' safety and welfare. Upon taking up post, the headteacher carried out an external review of safeguarding and of health and safety practices. Policies have been reviewed and leaders have ensured that teachers are aware of revised practices.

Staff work closely with families to secure improving rates of attendance and their actions have led to a significant reduction in persistent absence. Rates of attendance are now in line with those seen nationally. The chair of the governing body receives regular information on safeguarding issues and staff and governors receive up-to-date training on a range of safeguarding issues.

Pupils spoken with say that they feel safe in school, and the vast majority of their parents and carers agree. They say that bullying is rare and that staff are effective in addressing any potential instances of bullying.

Inspection findings

- Leaders are introducing new initiatives to improve pupils' progress in writing. Teachers are introducing topics to help pupils to generate more ideas for their writing, with particular initiatives aimed at boys. A review of books shows that pupils are being given more opportunities to work productively in a range of genres and that spelling is becoming more accurate. However, these initiatives are not being implemented with sufficient pace and leaders do not have a clear understanding of the emerging effect of these strategies on pupils' progress in writing.
- In 2017, disadvantaged pupils made good progress in reading and mathematics at the end of key stage 2. In addition, the proportions of pupils who achieved expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics increased by 9% and differences in attainment diminished. However, along with other pupils, their progress in writing was below average. An assistant headteacher will take up post after Easter with a specific focus on accelerating the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Current progress information shows that disadvantaged pupils are on a similar trajectory of improvement to that which saw good progress and improving attainment in 2017. However, differences in attainment

remain, particularly in the proportions of disadvantaged pupils working at greater depths of understanding.

- In 2017, the proportion of pupils working at greater depths of understanding increased in reading and writing to levels that were close to those seen nationally. However, differences remained at key stage 1 and in writing. The headteacher has modified the school improvement plan and performance management targets to accelerate further progress for current pupils. Subject leaders in English and mathematics are strengthening the curriculum to encourage more opportunities for pupils to experience challenge, but these initiatives are not being implemented with sufficient pace or consistency.
- Leaders in the early years provide the high standards of care and support that is representative of so much of the school's work. Teachers carry out thorough initial assessments to diagnose children's needs and abilities and use this to inform teaching and learning. Considerable initiatives have been introduced to develop children's speech and language skills and their awareness of number. Teachers work closely with external specialists and therapists to provide additional support. These actions have contributed to children making good progress from their starting points and achieving levels of development close to those seen nationally. Early years provision has shown consistent improvement over the last four years.
- Leaders and teachers provide high levels of support for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Teachers have a strong awareness of pupils' needs and provide effective support to meet those needs. Specific programmes promote pupils' social development and enhance their sensory awareness. Leaders work closely with external agencies and specialists to tailor support for pupils. This support contributed to pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities making good progress in reading and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 in 2017. However, their progress in writing was much weaker. The overall provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is strong as it significantly enhances their personal and social development and their acquisition of key skills.
- The school has received recognition as a flagship school and centre for excellence for its work to promote inclusion at all levels. The whole staff show a commitment to inclusion and provide extensive social, emotional and behavioural support to pupils and families. The welfare team has strong links with the local community and external agencies to remove barriers to learning and to heighten pupils' engagement in learning and wider aspects of school life.
- In meetings and in conversations around the school site, pupils demonstrated a pride in their school community. They appreciated their positive relationships with their teachers and the support they received. As one pupil said: 'Teachers don't shout. They show you how to improve.' Pupils value the extensive range of trips and residential visits and the wide range of extra-curricular sporting activities. These experiences enrich their learning and develop their self-confidence and social awareness.
- Parents hold the school in high esteem. In response to questionnaires, the vast majority said they felt their children were safe, well-supported and encouraged to

make good progress. A number of parents wrote about the transformative effect of the enhanced provision that supported their child's individual needs, while providing integrated access to school life. Many parents wrote to express how much they valued the school and the wider experiences it provides. As one parent wrote: 'The school staff ensure children are welcomed, feel valued and achieve their potential. I'm aware of many families moving their children to Easington Colliery School because of the high standards it strives for. I am very proud that my children go to this school.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- implement new strategies to improve the quality of pupils' writing with more pace and consistency
- accelerate actions to strengthen the curriculum, by enabling pupils to work at greater depths of understanding in English and mathematics across all year groups
- further improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils and diminish differences in attainment through the rigorous implementation of the pupil premium strategy
- enhance monitoring systems so that leaders and governors receive timely and insightful information on the pace of pupils' progress and the effect of improvement strategies.

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

Malcolm Kirtley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors explored the actions that teachers and leaders were taking to improve pupils' progress in writing and to increase the proportions of pupils working at greater depths of understanding across a range of subjects. We also explored provision and progress for disadvantaged pupils and for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. In addition, we explored whether the improving outcomes in the early years were being sustained. Inspectors also investigated many aspects of safeguarding practice.

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, your deputy headteacher, assistant headteachers and middle leaders. In addition, we talked to a wider group of staff.

We also spoke to two members of the governing body, including the chair. We held a meeting with a group of pupils and talked to pupils less formally in lessons. We talked to the educational development partner from the local authority. We looked at learning in lessons with your deputy headteacher and your assistant headteacher. We also scrutinised pupils' work in books and folders. We examined the school improvement plan as well as other documents, including the school's self-evaluation, behaviour and attendance records and assessment information. We examined safeguarding documents, including the single central record. We took into account 59 responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire and 32 parental free-text responses. We also took into account 32 responses to the staff questionnaire.