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Mrs Jean Orridge
Headteacher
High Clarence Primary School
Port Clarence Road
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Dear Mrs Orridge,

Short inspection of High Clarence Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 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 October 2013.

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.**

Your commitment to the pupils and the wider community you serve is unwavering. You know your pupils exceptionally well. You have a detailed knowledge of the local area and the difficulties faced by some of your families. This enables you to mitigate some of the challenges faced by pupils and to provide a haven of calm and security for them. Parents and carers have the utmost respect for you. Several parents who spoke to me at the start of the school day share the same view: 'The school is fantastic', 'Mrs Orridge is a great headteacher' and 'Nothing is too much trouble!'

Such comments regarding the high levels of care and support you afford extend to your staff, who are equally complimentary about your leadership. You invest heavily in continuous professional training and insist, as part of your appraisal process, that staff must visit other schools as part of their development, to share and learn from good practice beyond this small school. Consequently, staff morale is high.

Classrooms are vibrant and interesting. You have created a rich learning environment that celebrates pupils' achievements and provides them with useful prompts to support their learning. Displays on classroom walls and in corridors reflect the varying topics that pupils study. These topics provide an engaging context in which pupils learn.

You have established high expectations for pupils' behaviour. Such are the well-

established procedures, that pupils make the right choices subliminally. Staff share these high expectations. Classrooms are calm, and pupils' movement around the school is polite and orderly. You manage more challenging behaviours with great sensitivity, always ensuring that the pupils know that they are part of the 'Clarence family'. As a result, exclusions are rare and, when they do occur, they are a last resort. For the most part, pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning and are keen to talk about their work. When this is not the case, it is because the tasks they are given are either insufficiently challenging or are too difficult to complete without the support of adults.

You have secured accurate assessments of pupils' learning. You analyse pupils' progress in great detail. You use this information to identify your priorities for improvement successfully. However, while your plans are detailed and costed carefully, they are too descriptive. We agreed that plans need to be more sharply focused on how actions in them will improve pupils' progress and attainment and then how they will be evaluated accordingly. This is to enable leaders, including governors, to measure more accurately the impact of spending decisions.

Together, we reviewed the targets that you set for pupils' progress. Currently, your policy equates pupils' expected progress with 'three points'. Almost all pupils achieve this threshold successfully. However, given pupils' generally low starting points, you know that teachers' expectations of pupils' achievement need to be raised. This is in order that pupils can make the accelerated progress required to reach age-related expectations and to be academically ready for the next stage of their education.

At the time of the last inspection, you were asked to improve pupils' outcomes in writing. Although you have taken many actions in the intervening period, they have not had the required impact. In summer 2017, pupils' outcomes in writing were within the bottom 20% of all schools nationally. You appointed a new subject leader for English from September 2017. The leader has introduced a new approach, which uses high-quality texts as a stimulus for pupils' writing. This approach is providing a stronger structure for teachers' planning, which reflects the progression of skills needed for pupils to become competent writers. We agreed that leaders need to embed this approach in all year groups urgently.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors, have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Detailed checks are made on all staff wanting to work with pupils to ensure that they are fit to do so before their appointment.

The safeguarding governor undertakes her duties diligently and makes regular checks on school policy and procedure to ensure that they are fit for purpose. Local authority representatives support her in this role. Although findings are reported to full governing body meetings orally, there are no formal records kept. We agreed that all governing body monitoring reports should be recorded formally. Staff access training regularly to ensure that they are up to date with the

government's most recent legislation. All staff are fully aware of the responsibility they have in ensuring that pupils are safe.

Pupils said that they feel safe and that there is a trusted adult in whom they can confide should they have any concerns. They said that bullying can happen, but that it is mostly out of school. They explained how teachers help them to know what to do if it happens. They are particularly confident in understanding the dangers associated with using the internet and could explain the precautions they need to take to keep themselves safe.

Inspection findings

- My first focus for the inspection was to check whether the quality of teaching in reading and writing has remained good. Historically, pupils' outcomes for reading and writing have been in the bottom 20% of all schools nationally, and progress, although deemed broadly average, has been in negative figures.
- You have introduced a new approach to the teaching of writing, which provides a clear structure and progression of skills for teachers and pupils. In some year groups, this is enabling pupils to make accelerated progress. Consequently, increasing numbers of pupils are now reaching the expected standard for their age. However, this is not a consistent profile in all year groups. You agreed that there is an urgency to embed this approach, so that more pupils, particularly boys, can successfully reach the required standards.
- I wanted to review the effectiveness of phonics teaching. Over time, pupils' outcomes, although below the national average, have remained steady. However, in 2017, key stage 1 outcomes dipped below those found in previous years. This is because too many variations in approach have crept into teachers' practice. These require pupils to apply and remember different and unconnected strategies in their reading and writing. There is also too little expectation for pupils to use and apply their phonics skills to read and write unfamiliar words, outside of the discrete lessons. We agreed that this is an area for improvement. In the early years, however, the teaching of phonics is strong. Here, children get off to a good start and practice is consistent. Children are encouraged and expected to apply their early phonics skills to attempt to read and write their words. As a result, children are acquiring early knowledge and skills securely.
- A further focus was to review the teaching of reading beyond phonics. All classes have a daily guided-reading session, which focuses on developing pupils' reading comprehension skills. When pupils are working with their teacher, sessions offer challenge, particularly for the older pupils. Here, pupils are required to think and to explain their answers. However, when pupils are not working directly with their teacher, tasks are either too easy or too difficult or unrelated to developing pupils' comprehension skills. This slows pupils' progress.
- You have a watching eye on pupils' attendance. Last year, overall absence rates increased, as did pupils' persistent absenteeism, when compared to the national average. An established procedure is in place for dealing with pupils' absence, which you apply consistently. However, you recognise that you must try new strategies, as current figures for pupils' attendance and persistent absenteeism

show further decline. You and governors have very recently bought in additional support services to help you tackle this issue. This service is due to start this term.

- I wanted to check the impact of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. The proportions of pupils who fall into both groups are higher than the national average. You track pupils' needs and achievement carefully, to ensure that a range of external agencies is involved in their care. You have high levels of additional support providing several interventions and offering emotional and social support, which you plan carefully. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are making good progress in accordance with their needs. The progress of disadvantaged pupils is variable across year groups and subjects and mirrors the progress of other pupils, particularly in reading and writing.
- My final focus was to review the quality of teaching and learning in the early years. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development improved markedly in 2017. However, some outcomes in the prime areas of learning, relating to physical development, recorded the lowest scores. I wanted to see how leaders had responded to this. I found that staff in the early years had responded immediately to this issue. They have adapted children's tasks in both indoor and outdoor learning, to provide more opportunities for children to practise their much-needed fine motor skills. This is reflective of the strong and purposeful leadership offered by your early years leader, who you appointed in 2017. Her knowledge of the early years curriculum is excellent, and she is undoubtedly the reason why children's outcomes at the end of Reception improved markedly last year. She has established a strong and cohesive team of skilled practitioners. The recent appointment of a Nursery teacher has strengthened the team further. Together, they have created a vibrant learning environment, in which children thrive. They have a strong understanding of children's needs and they use assessment information to plan activities effectively. This is resulting in confident children who are keen to try new things and highly skilled staff who offer timely support and encouragement to them.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- plans to improve the work of the school are succinct documents that focus on the gains in pupils' achievement that you desire and are evaluated regularly against them
- targets set for pupils' progress reflect the need for pupils to be making accelerated progress
- approaches to the teaching of writing are embedded in all classes with urgency
- the teaching of phonics is consistent, and pupils are encouraged to use their phonics skills outside the discrete lessons
- efforts to improve pupils' attendance are continued.

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

Yours sincerely

Diane Buckle
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy, the English subject leader and the early years leader, to discuss aspects of the school's work. You shared your own written evaluations of the effectiveness of the school and your improvement plans. We observed learning together in all year groups. We looked at your own assessment information and work in pupils' books.

I reviewed a range of documents, including those relating to safeguarding, attendance and reports from your local authority's school improvement partner. I talked to pupils about their learning, as we observed learning in classes and more formally, when I heard a group of pupils read.

I talked to several parents at the start of the school day and took account of eight responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and eight free text commentaries. I also met with eight members of the governing body, including the chair of governors and the school's local authority improvement partner.