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1 June 2018

Mrs Shona Randle  
Headteacher  
Whitehouse Primary School  
Dunelm Road  
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Stockton-on-Tees  
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Dear Mrs Randle

### **Short inspection of Whitehouse Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 15 May 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 your school was judged to be good in January 2014.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Your aim, to offer an education which will 'develop each pupil's potential, academically, emotionally and physically', is being met. Pupils in your care are making gains in their learning, and developing well into rounded citizens. Pupils who have complex physical and medical needs, and who are attached to the specialist provision, are being supported effectively.

Your school is inclusive and caring. Your determined and consistent approach ensures that pupils make strong progress at school, and leave ready for the next stage in their education. Your new assistant headteachers are developing well into their roles. Yours is a happy school and, as one parent told me: 'The school goes above and beyond that which is expected. My daughter leaves this year and wishes she could take all of the staff with her.' This typifies the comments of many parents, carers and staff.

You are aware of the strengths of teaching at the school, and the areas that need further attention. Teaching at your school is characterised by good routines, which pupils understand, and a calm and focused approach in classrooms. Teachers plan lessons effectively, using a variety of techniques and activities to make sure that all of their pupils engage well. Pupils who have physical disabilities learn in the environment that best suits their individual needs. Some learn in mainstream classes, some with specialist staff in different classrooms, and others spend time in

both. This tailored approach ensures that these pupils' needs are met effectively. The teaching of writing is particularly strong at your school. I observed pupils in Year 3 and Year 4 writing at length, and with increasing accuracy. From looking at the writing that pupils produce in different year groups, it is clear that pupils make strides in writing across the school. Pupils were certainly excited to write imaginatively about the adventures of one of the corgis at the royal wedding.

As I observed learning at school and looked at exercise books, I noted that, sometimes, pupils were not being encouraged to think deeply about what they are doing. In mathematics, lots of time is spent practising calculations, but less time thinking through problems or explaining how mathematics works. Similarly, in reading, pupils are practising comprehension, but spending less time developing skills such as inference or deduction. You have noticed this, and plans are in place to develop these skills. Recently, for example, you have introduced 'challenge days'. Here, pupils designed a space station, or worked together to find 'Grubble', the school gnome, who had been kidnapped. Activities focused on solving problems and working together. You agree with me, however, that improvement planning is not as sharp as it could be. There are not enough measurable outcomes for you to know if you have been successful in your endeavours.

Your pupils typically feel part of a warm, happy family at school. They have a deep understanding that everyone is different. They see difference at school, and yet they are 'blind' to it. Pupils talked to me animatedly about how good they think their school is. They are particularly impressed at the range of clubs on offer for them, including gardening, knitting, origami and computing.

You and your team have been effective in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The quality of teaching at key stage 1 has improved. The progress that pupils make and the standards that they reach in writing are now strengths of the school. Your focus on spelling and handwriting has had a positive impact. You, together with members of the governing body, have rightly identified that too small a proportion of pupils reach higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics. You, and your team, are working hard to remedy this.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Your organised and well-trained team ensures that safeguarding requirements are met and fit for purpose. Your records are thorough and of good quality. Staff take the time to get to know pupils well and this supports a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Checks on staff and visitors are completed efficiently, and staff training for safeguarding is comprehensive.

You place pupils at the centre of school life. An example of this is the wide variety of leadership opportunities on offer. Pupils develop their skills, and help others in the school community, by supporting the school council, acting as play leaders at breaktime, being a 'reading buddy' for younger pupils, or leading activities as house captains. The Rights Respecting School Award ensures that your focus on the well-

being and development of pupils runs right through the curriculum. Pupils, for example, have focused on the importance of access to water for people right across the world.

Pupils say that they feel safe, and cared for, at school. You make sure that pupils who have physical disabilities are safe at school. For example, pupils who arrive in taxis transfer safely into wheelchairs, and you have made sure that the building is fully accessible for them. You work well with outside agencies to ensure that pupils whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable are kept safe and that their needs are met. You monitor these pupils closely, and make referrals promptly when the need arises.

Pupils are polite and courteous, and they move sensibly around the building. Pupils behave well in class and focus on the task in hand. They told me about the 'good to be green' system at school, and how they would not want to lose any 'golden time' by moving into the amber or red zones by not meeting the standards of behaviour that you expect of them. Pupils are confident that if any unkind words are ever used, or that if anyone is ever being bullied, adults in school would help sort it out immediately. You use an electronic system to track any concerns about pupils' behaviour, and your staff use this consistently. You are quickly made aware of any concerns about safeguarding or misbehaviour, so that it can be followed up swiftly.

### **Inspection findings**

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in reading is improving. Your focus on ensuring that parents support your efforts in this area has been effective. An increasing number of parents are reading regularly at home with their children. You are using a variety of techniques to raise the profile of reading at school. Pupils are involved in World Book Day, theatre visits, and several act as 'reading buddies' for younger pupils.
- Your focus on comprehension is helping to develop pupils' understanding, and they are practising this and other related skills well. They are developing inference and deduction skills less quickly.
- Disadvantaged pupils are making strong progress at school. This is because you are raising their aspirations, and helping to develop their resilience. They are progressing well in reading, writing and mathematics, and in other subjects across the curriculum. You are aware that, for some of these pupils, the standards that they are reaching could be even higher.
- You and your team are effective at meeting the needs of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Teachers know the specific needs of pupils in their class and plan activities that are appropriate for them, but that also stretch them. Teaching assistants help individual pupils well, and question them effectively.
- Provision is excellent for pupils who have complex physical and medical needs, and who are attached to the specialist provision. They are fully included in school life. Lesson planning is bespoke and meets the individual needs of these pupils very well. The flexible approach within school allows these pupils to access the

mainstream curriculum when they are able. You have ensured that the structure of the school responds nimbly to the additional needs that these pupils have.

- Your parent support adviser ensures that pupils attend school whenever they are able. If a pupil is not attending school for spurious reasons, your response is robust and direct. Conversely, if a pupil is unable to attend because of medical need, you support them both academically and socially. One parent told me that you sent a pack of work home in order to help her child catch up with work that had been missed due to a hospital admission. Hidden within the pack of work were get-well cards from the class, together with short letters about what was happening at school. Any worries about returning to school, for that pupil, disappeared as a result. This exemplifies your caring approach.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- a greater proportion of pupils reach higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics
- the teaching of reasoning and problem solving in mathematics, and the skills of inference and deduction in reading is more effective
- monitoring systems are more precise, measurable and focused.

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

Michael Wardle  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this one-day inspection, I met with you, the assistant headteachers and other members of the leadership team. I spoke with colleagues responsible for safeguarding and attendance, and I met with the special educational needs coordinator. I also met with members of the governing body, including the chair. You joined me as I observed teaching and learning across the school. I spoke to a groups of pupils at lunchtime and spoke to others at breaktime. I reviewed pupils' work from different year groups and from a variety of subjects, and I listened to pupils from different year groups read. You presented information detailing pupils' progress and attainment, the school's self-evaluation document and the school development plan. I discussed the school's journey of improvement with a representative of the local authority. A variety of other documents were considered, including those relating to safeguarding and policies on the school's website.

I considered the 45 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View), and the 39 responses to the staff questionnaire. I spoke to a group of parents at the beginning of the school day.

This inspection particularly focused on a number of key questions:

- How strong is the teaching of reading at school? What are school leaders doing to ensure that pupils' rates of progress in this subject are improving, and are they effective in doing so?
- Are disadvantaged pupils making strong progress across the curriculum? How do school leaders know?
- How well are the needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities being met, including those attached to the specialist provision for pupils who have complex physical and medical needs?
- How successful are leaders' strategies for improving overall attendance and reducing persistent absence?
- Is safeguarding effective?