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Mrs Patricia Monk
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Monk

Short inspection of North Park Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 26 June 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.**

Since the previous inspection, you have sustained a heart-warmingly, positive atmosphere across the school. You pay careful attention to making sure that North Park Primary is a well-maintained, attractive learning space for pupils. Displays are vibrant, informative and celebratory of pupils' work. You know pupils and their families well and listen carefully to their opinions and ideas. Parents and carers appreciate the 'calm environment', good communication and help that they receive. One parent's views epitomised the views of others saying that parents are 'always well informed' about any events taking place. Your staff are cheerful and welcoming, adding to the pleasant atmosphere. Parents find staff 'patient, approachable and friendly', saying that 'support... has been exceptional' and any 'concerns are always listened to and addressed'. Pupils concur with their parents' views, finding that 'all the teachers look after you' and 'are nice'. Pupils themselves are delightfully kind and polite.

There has been significant instability in staffing since the school was last inspected. This has contributed to some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment over time. You have, for example, found pupils' outcomes in reading concerning and have acted to address some of the underlying issues you found. Reading is a priority area for improvement on the whole-school development plan. You enhanced the school library; it is enticing, spacious and enriched with a wide

variety of reading materials for all ages. The new outdoor 'reading pods' and 'reading boxes' designed by pupils show that you respond to pupils' views about their reading choices. Book-themed doorways to each classroom raise the profile of authors, reading and books. Nonetheless, some issues persist and require further attention. Leaders' improvement plans are not specific or detailed enough to secure better outcomes for pupils. In key stage 2, pupils' attainment in reading has remained well below the national average over time. Not all children in the early years or key stage 1 read frequently with adults in school and too many pupils currently lack challenge in their reading.

The previous report challenged you to improve pupils' writing. You have put in place professional development opportunities for staff to hone their skills, knowledge and understanding of the teaching of phonics, reading and writing. The attention that you have placed on improving pupils' basic skills, the quality of teaching, pupils' reading materials and the building of pupils' vocabulary shows that you fully grasp the crucial links between reading and writing. Your actions have led to some positive overall improvements in pupils' outcomes this year. However, you have correctly identified that several issues in terms of the quality of pupils' writing remain.

Your enthusiastic, experienced deputy headteacher supports and challenges teachers in their planning and delivery of English, modelling good practice. Teachers' assessment information in key stage 2 suggests that the proportion of pupils who are writing at the expected standard has been broadly in line with national averages over time. The work in pupils' books, as well as weaknesses in their outcomes in reading, however, suggest that teachers' assessment is not consistently accurate. In some year groups currently, pupils' work shows that too few pupils write at the standards expected for their age. In the early years and in key stage 1 in particular, teachers do not offer pupils enough opportunities to write at length. Too little challenge hampers some pupils' ability to practise and apply their skills of writing to become fluent, confident writers. Not all teachers demand that the quality of pupils' writing is sustained across subjects. Consequently, not all pupils are well prepared for the demands of the next year.

Recommendations in the previous inspection report also required you to make sure that pupils were using their skills in writing and mathematics across subjects. From Year 1, pupils now demonstrate their skills, knowledge and understanding of science in their books. Your science leader uses a stimulating science 'question of the week' to encourage pupils to discuss and reflect upon scientific concepts. Visitors and visits within the theme of science are invited and organised to give pupils first-hand experiences of exciting experiments and investigations. You have, however, noticed that some pupils are not challenged enough in their science work. Some subject leaders are lacking in confidence about the way in which the early years curriculum relates to their area of the curriculum and prepares children for learning in their particular subject. The quality and depth of work that some pupils produce in English and mathematics is not consistently maintained across their work in science. You have plans afoot to make changes to aspects of the leadership, teaching and learning in science for September 2018. It is too soon to predict if

these will make a difference to subject leadership, the quality of pupils' work or raise pupils' outcomes in science.

Safeguarding is effective.

Your insightful knowledge of pupils and their families helps you to involve other agencies where any concerns or vulnerabilities arise. There is a perceptibly nurturing aura around school. Intent on developing pupils' mental health and well-being, for example, you introduced various activities and relaxation techniques with the support of occupational health experts. Pupils who spoke with me or responded to Ofsted's survey say that they feel safe in your happy, caring school. Their parents agree; as one parent put it, 'the physical environment is very pleasant and wholly safe'. Your work to support pupils' personal, social, emotional and behavioural needs is a strength.

Until recently, you have maintained a paper-based system of managing concerns about incidents or issues of poor behaviour. This allowed leaders to spot patterns, support individuals promptly and evaluate the effectiveness of leaders' responses over time. You have worked diligently to reduce the use of fixed-term exclusions. No pupils have been excluded this year. You felt, however, that systems could be sharpened further and have recently introduced an electronic system for gathering and logging concerns. This indicates that you search for continuous improvement in keeping pupils safe and well looked after.

Staff meetings have safeguarding as a standing agenda item which helps to keep all adults informed about pressing issues. You make sure that staff and governors have been trained in matters of child protection. This means that they understand their duties and responsibilities in protecting and caring for pupils. A few members of staff found it difficult to explain the finer details of some aspects of the most recent guidance, for example the government's 'Prevent' duty. Recognising this, you have recently created a new staff induction handbook which contains a broader range of pertinent safeguarding information. You are working with governors to find a way in which you can capture the true extent of staff's knowledge and understanding.

Inspection findings

- You have managed a good deal of change in staffing since the previous inspection. Several teachers and leaders are new or recently appointed. This has meant that subject and key stage leadership has altered and shifted over time. With more than double the proportion of disadvantaged pupils than the average primary school, you have not lessened your focus on managing the needs of vulnerable pupils and families throughout this period of change. You are diligent in promoting pupils' positive personal, social and emotional needs effectively. Your delightful pupils' good manners are a testament to this.
- Together with staff, you have concentrated on raising the profile of reading across key stages. Pupils say that they like books and reading. However, not all pupils are currently making good progress in their reading. Not all staff have the skills needed to use assessment effectively to plan successfully for pupils. Books

too often are lacking in challenge and are not consistently well matched to pupils' phonics abilities or comprehension skills. Not all Reception children or key stage 1 pupils read regularly with adults. The proportion of pupils reaching expected standards in reading in key stage 1 in 2017 was in the lowest 10% of all schools, with disadvantaged pupils doing particularly poorly. In key stage 2, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading has been well below the national average for two years. Although outcomes this year look more promising, there is work to do to ensure that all pupils are well prepared for the next year group or stage in their learning.

- Writing has been a key area for improvement since the previous inspection. Pupils' books, however, show that they still make variable rates of progress over time. Too few opportunities are offered for pupils to have a go and write for extended, uninterrupted periods of time. In Reception and key stage 1, in particular, pupils do not develop the stamina needed to create lengthier pieces of writing. Less than half of disadvantaged pupils in key stage 1 reached the expected standard in writing in 2017. While outcomes in key stage 2 have appeared stronger over time, writing in current pupils' books across the wider curriculum is inconsistent in quality. Pupils are not challenged by adults effectively to sustain the quality of their writing across subjects.
- Pupils enjoy science. They talk excitedly about the weekly science questions that whet their appetite and inspire wonder about science. Work in pupils' current science books, however, is variable in quality. The most able and some other pupils are at times given work that is poorly matched to their needs. Sometimes activities lack challenge and fail to stretch pupils sufficiently in their thinking; they already know and can do the learning they have been tasked with. A small proportion of pupils who responded to Ofsted's survey said that they find their work is not challenging enough.
- You have put pupils' basic skills development as a firm focus for improvement in your plans. Aside from the issues already described in reading and writing, you correctly deduced that some pupils' core mathematical skills needed to improve. In 2017 in key stage 1, pupils' attainment in mathematics was below average and in the lowest 10% of all schools. In key stage 2 pupils' attainment declined with just 52% reaching the expected standard. Key stage 2 boys and disadvantaged pupils did especially poorly in mathematics compared to others nationally, with less than half the pupils in each group reaching the expected standard in mathematics.
- Staff talk knowledgeably about how to protect pupils from harm. They know what to look out for and how to report their concerns. Staff are vigilant and committed to keeping pupils safe. One pupil told me that the systems for locking school gates and doors and ensuring that computers had suitable filters to protect them online were comforting. A small proportion of adults, however, had some trouble explaining how the most up-to-date guidance, for example the government's 'Prevent' duty, related to their daily practices.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching and learning, across key stages and subjects, is consistent and all pupils are challenged sufficiently in their work
- senior and subject leaders' planning, particularly in science, mathematics and English, is detailed, has clear timeframes and specified actions and is evaluated regularly to determine the extent to which plans are supporting improvement in pupils' outcomes
- teacher assessment is consistently accurate across subjects and specifically in writing
- all pupils, especially those in the early years and key stage 1, read regularly with adults, have greater challenge in their reading and writing and have increased opportunities to write at length
- all staff have a deep understanding of the government's 'Prevent' duty and updated safeguarding information.

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

Fiona Manuel
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, your deputy headteacher, subject leaders, governors, including the chair of the governing body, and a representative from the local authority. You and I, or your deputy and I, jointly observed teaching, learning and assessment in classes across key stages. I scrutinised work in pupils' books, listened to some pupils read and spoke with pupils from each key stage. Thirty-five pupils responded to Ofsted's questionnaire for pupils. I reviewed school documentation and information, including your evaluation of the school's effectiveness document, policies, assessment information, monitoring files and your school improvement plans. I took account of 20 comments from Parent View, the Ofsted online survey, nine free-text comments made by parents and the school's own survey of parents' views. I spoke with staff during the inspection and also considered the views of four members of staff who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire.