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Mrs Ann Kane
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Kane

Short inspection of Annfield Plain Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 18 October 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 November 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have provided strong, dedicated and astute leadership, which has driven the continuous development of the school. The appointment of the deputy headteacher in September 2017 has increased leadership capacity to assist the delivery of your vision for improvement. Along with your leaders and governors, you have accurately identified the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. The school's detailed self-evaluation and improvement plan clearly identify the priorities for improving the school further.

Leaders, staff and governors have successfully tackled the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. They have also maintained the previously identified strengths. This is because you and your staff regularly review the quality of teaching and your curriculum provision, to ensure that these meet the needs of your pupils. Leaders use a range of approaches, including seeking an external view from the local authority education development partner and headteacher colleagues, to check the impact of their actions.

A key strength of the school that has been maintained is the personal development and welfare of your pupils. From the very outset, children starting in the Reception class enter a caring, nurturing environment which helps them to develop their social skills and self-confidence. This continues as pupils get older with a range of opportunities for responsible roles around school, such as the school council and the energy team, to develop pupils' citizenship skills. Parents and carers who responded

to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were overwhelmingly positive about your school and all would recommend the school to another parent. Many parents mentioned the caring and supportive ethos of the school where the staff help children to learn and thrive.

The key area for improvement at the last inspection was to raise attainment further. You and your staff have made great strides in addressing this. In early years, children are making at least good progress from their starting points and many are making rapid progress. As a result, the proportion of children achieving a good level of achievement has improved over the last four years and your 2018 results were particularly strong. Furthermore, the proportions of children who are exceeding the expected standards in all areas of the early years curriculum compare very favourably with the national averages. However, you are not complacent, and you continue to work to improve children's outcomes in writing, particularly for boys.

Similar to the improving outcomes in early years, pupils continue to make good progress across key stage 1. In 2018, pupils', including disadvantaged pupils', outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics generally improved. Consequently, pupils' attainment at both the expected standard and greater depth is strong in these subjects. However, you and your staff remain focused on embedding some of recently introduced improvements for the teaching of writing and mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders, staff and governors give the highest priority to keeping pupils safe and there is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. Leaders complete careful safeguarding checks for all staff, governors and volunteers. Staff and governors receive regular and appropriate training, so they know the school's procedures and how to keep pupils safe. Links with other agencies are well managed. You have a good understanding of how to deal with any concerns linked to safeguarding pupils from extremism and on the rare occasion that you have had concerns you have responded to them promptly. All parents who responded to the Parent View questionnaire believe that their child is happy and feels safe in school.

Inspection findings

- You are an outward-looking leader who works well with other schools in the locality. This is helping to support pupils' transition and their continuity of learning when they move to their next school. Your work with the local school cluster, completing headteacher peer reviews of each other's schools, enables you to gain an objective check of your school's improvements. At the same time, this network of schools enables you to identify effective practice which may be adapted to improve your school.
- The recently appointed deputy headteacher has been very effective in driving improvements in early years provision and mathematics. His initial focus on developing early years has improved the quality of early years provision and children's outcomes by the end of Reception.
- Development of mathematics has been a more recent focus for your school.

There are some early signs of improved approaches to mathematics teaching which we noted during our visits to lessons and reviews of pupils' books. Staff make effective use of practical resources, questioning and modelling to develop pupils' learning. However, you agreed that there is some further work to be done to refine and embed some of this work, particularly in ensuring opportunities for pupils of all abilities to develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills. Also, on occasions, pupils are continuing to work through mathematics calculations when they have demonstrated secure knowledge over a period of time.

- The subject leader for English has acted effectively to develop phonics teaching further and to improve the approach to teaching writing. She uses a range of strategies to check that these improvements are implemented successfully.
- Staff teach phonics in a structured and regular fashion from Reception and across key stage 1. As a result, pupils' results on the Year 1 phonics screening check have improved across the last three years and are above the national average.
- Recently, teachers have used a range of interesting books to motivate pupils to write and to enrich pupils' vocabulary. While overall, our visits to lessons and review of pupils' books showed that this approach was having a positive effect on pupils' writing, you agreed that there is a need for some further refinements. For example, sometimes higher-attaining pupils are restricted by the writing format provided. This sets a ceiling on these pupils demonstrating fully what they could achieve. Equally, some pupils occasionally are not fully completing the writing activity. As a result, it is difficult to assess if they fully understand the writing structure being taught. We discussed that for some teaching activities, pupils' learning would be better supported if there was an increased number of the quality texts available for pupils.
- A structured approach to the teaching of handwriting has a positive effect on the quality of pupils' handwriting and presentation. From Reception, teachers provide children with guidance on letter formation and opportunities to access a range of activities, such as dough gym, to build children's muscle strength and motor skills. Regular handwriting practice across key stage 1 builds on this work. Consequently, pupils' work shows consistently high-quality handwriting.
- The focus of you and your staff on improving pupils' attendance and reducing persistent absence is bearing fruit. Regular communication with parents and the school's reward systems ensure that the importance of good attendance is given a high priority. Weekly reviews of attendance by the education welfare officer (EWO) check where pupils' absence is a cause for concern. Where pupils are displaying poor attendance levels you and your team, including the EWO and a teaching assistant who also works as a parent support adviser, provide guidance on how to improve pupils' attendance.
- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary in lessons and at other times throughout the day. In lessons, pupils respond promptly to teachers' instructions because teachers have well-established routines and expectations for behaviour. Pupils understand how the school's behaviour management system works. The recognition of good behaviour and attitudes to learning is clear across the school. At breaktimes, pupils play friendly games together; there are a range of resources to encourage active physical development and quiet areas to socialise.

- Governors have a good understanding of the school's priorities. This is because they receive regular updates from the headteacher and leaders. Some governors also visit the school to consider the impact of leaders' actions. For example, this helps governors see for themselves the effect of safeguarding systems and pupil premium spending.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the recently introduced approach to developing writing across the school is embedded, so that pupils', particularly boys', writing outcomes continue to improve
- the improved approaches to mathematics develop further, so that pupils are provided with more opportunities to use reasoning and problem-solving skills and that teachers intervene more promptly when pupils have displayed secure understanding of mathematical knowledge.

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

Michael Reeves
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I discussed the work of the school with you, your deputy headteacher and the leader for English. I observed and spoke with pupils during playtime and at other times during the day. I met with the school's education development partner from the local authority. My discussions with six governors, including the chair of the governing body, provided me with additional information. I considered school documentation, assessment information, policies and information posted on the school website. I considered the 35 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View and the 33 parents' free-text responses. Along with you, I visited all classes to observe teaching and learning. I listened to some pupils read within lessons. I looked at pupils' writing and mathematics work to help evaluate the quality of teaching and learning over time. I considered information relating to safeguarding, attendance, behaviour and bullying.