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16 November 2018

Mrs Jacqueline Marr
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Dear Mrs Marr

Short inspection of Northern Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 31 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Your steeliness and determination have underpinned the school's continued good performance despite a number of staffing changes and challenges. You are well supported by an effective governing body whose members are unwavering in their high aspirations for all pupils. You have the support of staff and parents and carers. One parent commented, 'This is an excellent school; there is a real community spirit.'

Pupils enter the school with skills and abilities that are broadly expected for their age. By the time they leave the school at the end of Year 6, the proportion achieving the expected standard, and the proportion reaching the higher standard or working at greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics are both above the national average. This is due to strong leadership and high-quality teaching over time. Pupils' progress in reading and writing is particularly strong.

Children make good progress in early years and benefit from a stimulating and enchanting outdoor area. They make the most of opportunities to discover, to be creative and to write. Counting and number work activities are promoted well, although children occasionally require more adult direction to complete these activities successfully.

Pupils behave well around school and outside. Their attendance is above the

national average. Pupils say that they enjoy school and they appreciate the range of clubs and activities on offer. Pupils engage well in their learning as the majority of teaching is typically well suited to their needs. For example, in a Year 6 lesson, pupils learned about the features of weathering and erosion. Different groups eagerly investigated the effects of chemical weathering, while others performed an experiment to understand how erosion occurs. All pupils were challenged and engaged in their learning.

The curriculum is enriched by many spiritual, moral, social and cultural events including performance-based poetry, African drumming, Diwali dancing and many sporting and musical experiences. Pupils' work in subjects such as history and geography shows that the curriculum has breadth. However, it is sometimes lacking in depth. Pupils do not consistently achieve the same depth of understanding in humanities subjects as they do in English, science and mathematics. This is because the curriculum often flits between topics, which does not help pupils to link their learning and secure a deeper understanding of the subjects they are studying.

Leaders and governors have responded well to the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. The quality of teaching overall is strong. We observed Year 1 pupils practising their handwriting. The teacher modelled effectively, set high expectations and supported pupils very well. Writing is taught well across the curriculum and standards of spelling and grammar are high. Scrutiny of pupils' books and the work displayed around the school shows some very lively, expressive and technically accurate pieces of work.

Attainment in key stage 2 mathematics remains above the national average, but progress is more typically in line with that of other schools. Leaders and governors have a thorough and detailed plan in place to improve pupils' progress in mathematics. There is a greater focus upon fluency and explaining mathematical methodology. The plan has had a positive impact and current assessment data shows that pupils' progress in this subject is picking up.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The single central record meets requirements, child protection training is up to date and child protection records are kept securely. You showed me some good examples of how you use early help to support pupils and their families. In more complex cases, the diligence of your staff has led to rapid support for pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable.

Almost all parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, felt that their children are safe in school, a view that is mirrored by pupils. There have been no permanent or fixed-term exclusions since the previous inspection. A couple of parents whom I spoke with or who responded to the Ofsted survey felt that bullying is not being dealt with effectively. Current records show that instances of bullying are carefully logged and dealt with in a timely manner.

Inspection findings

- The inspection paid particular attention to some key lines of enquiry. The first of these looked at how well the most able pupils achieve. Inspection evidence showed that the most able pupils make good progress. In 2018, the proportion of pupils achieving the high standard in reading, grammar, punctuation and spelling and greater depth in writing was well above the national average. The proportion of pupils achieving the high standard in mathematics was broadly average. Teachers' high expectations are a key factor in ensuring that the most able pupils enjoy success.
- The second line of enquiry focused on mathematics. Outcomes in key stage 2 mathematics dipped slightly last year, but in key stage 1 they remained well above national averages. Twice the number of Year 2 pupils achieved beyond the expected standard than is the case nationally.
- Scrutiny of mathematics books and lesson observations from across key stage 2 show that there is much strong practice and helpful feedback in mathematics, which supports pupils' learning. For example, in a Year 5 mathematics lesson, the teacher regularly checked how well pupils had understood and could apply their learning. When pupils did not fully understand, the teacher quickly stepped in to address pupils' misconceptions.
- Current assessment data shows that progress in mathematics is improving in key stage 2. Leaders have addressed the issue of variability in the quality of teaching. However, there is still more to be done to ensure that the teaching of mathematics is as consistently effective as it is for English.
- The final line of enquiry looked at the quality of pupils' learning in subjects other than English and mathematics. Outcomes in science are strong, and there are good examples in pupils' books of activities promoting scientific enquiry. Scrutiny of pupils' work shows that standards in humanities subjects are more varied. There were some good-quality individual pieces of work in religious education, geography and history, but on occasion, there is a lack of depth to pupils' understanding. This is because teaching does not consistently and effectively connect current subject knowledge with prior learning and therefore learning in these subjects sometimes seems disjointed.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching in key stage 2 mathematics continues to improve
- pupils acquire a greater depth of knowledge in humanities subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Sally Kenyon
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and spoke to a representative from the local authority. I spoke with a range of pupils and parents before school and during social times. I met with members of the governing body. We scrutinised a range of workbooks across a variety of subjects and year groups. I analysed the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans. We looked at the school's record of checks made on the suitability of staff and records of child protection and staff training. We discussed wider safeguarding. I considered 19 free-text responses and 20 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.