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11 January 2019

Mrs Alison Smith
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Smith

Short inspection of Yohden Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 18 December 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.

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.**

During our discussions, you told me that it was important to you that pupils in the school 'believe in themselves' and to 'have strong desire to achieve in the wider world'. You and your team have successfully developed a curriculum with a substantial international dimension. This allows pupils to learn about life beyond Horden and the north-east of England. For example, Year 3 pupils develop their English and mathematical skills while learning to 'save the world' or during investigations into 'temples and tombs'. Pupils say that this approach makes their lessons interesting and enjoyable.

Pupils are proud of their school. Their behaviour is excellent, and the vast majority of pupils display consistently positive attitudes to their learning. During the inspection, pupils were polite, courteous and eager to speak with me. Out of lessons, pupils held open doors for their peers and visitors. Without prompting, they naturally say 'please' and 'thank you' and work well independently and in groups. There are very few instances of low-level disruption or off-task behaviour. You place an emphasis on developing pupils' social and communication skills. Staff model high expectations in this regard and pupils respond accordingly, engaging in regular discussion with staff about their learning and wider interests.

During the last year, the school has experienced a substantial amount of staffing turbulence. Consequently, some pupils have been taught by three different teachers. This has interrupted the learning of some pupils and placed additional pressure on senior leaders when staff with additional responsibilities leave the school. Nevertheless, leaders have been unwavering in their commitment to do their very best for all pupils. A new experienced leader will join the school in January 2019 to strengthen leadership and ease the burden on current leaders.

Over time, published data and unvalidated results for 2018 show that pupils' progress in reading across key stage 2 has declined. In 2018, the progress made by Year 6 pupils, in reading, placed the school in the bottom 10 per cent of schools nationally. Furthermore, the proportion of pupils achieving above the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1 has declined for the last two years and is now below average.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders make appropriate checks to ensure that staff are safe to work with children. All staff receive regular training to help them understand their safeguarding roles and responsibilities. Leaders are mindful of the most recent local and national advice to ensure that pupils are safe from harm or neglect. For example, following an update of statutory safeguarding guidance for schools in September 2018, leaders updated the school's management information system to ensure that at least two emergency contact telephone numbers for each pupil were recorded.

Staff are clear about procedures where they are concerned about the safety of a pupil. They diligently follow up on any unexplained pupil absences.

Pupils say that they feel safe; an increasing number of pupils perceive the school to be a haven. They know that they are well cared for by staff. Pupils are taught about the potential risks of using the internet and talking to strangers. The school's own information highlights that bullying is rare. Pupils say that teachers are effective at de-escalating quarrels between friends. Pupils have a good understanding of right and wrong. They are confident to speak their mind and will let a member of staff know if they are worried about a friend.

Inspection findings

- From low starting points, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of Reception is broadly average. However, by the end of Year 1, the proportion of pupils who pass the phonics screening check is often below average. Although improving recently, the progress that current pupils make in reading is variable across the school. Leaders are aware that pupils' reading needs to improve. They ensure that pupils' reading books match their phonic development. Furthermore, the teaching of phonics is given sufficient time each day. Teachers in the school ensure that pupils do not normally learn new phonics knowledge until they have practised and mastered previously taught

letter sounds. This ensures that most pupils can apply a range of different techniques to help them read unfamiliar words. However, scrutiny of pupils' work shows that pupils do not consistently use their phonic knowledge in their writing. Pupils' spelling is weak. This is because some teachers do not follow agreed school strategies or policies to identify and correct pupils' spelling errors. Consequently, common spelling errors are evident throughout pupils' writing.

- Rates of attendance have improved. During the 2016/17 academic year, pupils' attendance was below average and too many pupils were persistently absent. Leaders have worked hard to ensure that pupils attend school more often. Parents and carers receive frequent attendance reminders by post. Additionally, leaders have introduced new electronic signing-in procedures for pupils who arrive at school late. Following the appointment of a parent support assistant, some families now receive personalised support to help pupils overcome the barriers that contribute to them attending school less often. Pupils' attendance increased during the last academic year and rates of attendance were broadly average. Further improvements have not materialised this academic year. The school's own information shows that pupils' current attendance is similar to the previous year. This is because a minority of pupils continue to attend school less often. Leaders are working closely with these pupils to ensure that overall rates of attendance improve. There are green shoots of improvement in this regard. For example, rates of persistent absence are reducing and are now below average.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is variable. Some teachers pay close attention to pupils' prior assessment information when planning lessons. The activities most pupils are asked to complete are well matched to their starting points and provide an appropriate amount of challenge over time. Teachers, particularly in key stage 2, ask searching questions of pupils. This is because the teachers' subject knowledge is strong, particularly in mathematics. Leaders have invested in new mathematics schemes of work and pupil workbooks. This has helped to improve the consistency of what is taught across the school. However, some of the activities do not bring out the best in the most and least able pupils. This is because the questions pupils are required to complete are sometimes too easy or too difficult. Leaders say that they have identified this as a concern. They intend to adapt the activities so that they better support all pupils in the future. More recently, the progress that pupils make in their reading across key stage 2 has declined. Leaders and governors acknowledge that this is a priority for the school. Following the publication of the 2018 key stage 2 results, leaders swiftly adapted the school improvement plan to emphasise the importance of improving this aspect of the school's work.
- Teaching in key stage 1 and the early years is not leading to current pupils making consistently strong progress in their writing. The school's own information suggests that fewer Reception children are expected to reach a good level of development this year. Leaders say that children have taken longer to settle into routines this year. Furthermore, a greater number of children have starting points on entry that are below those seen typically, with more children requiring significant support in their learning. Nevertheless, some staff do not teach early writing skills effectively. Some pupils continue to hold a pen incorrectly and outdoor activities that are designed to improve pupils' reading and

writing skills sometimes lack focus.

- Leaders' plans to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes lack precision. For example, current plans do not identify who will monitor the progress of each activity. Furthermore, some of the actions are similar to the success criteria. As a result, leaders and governors do not have a medium for holding others to account with increased rigour; an aspect of their own work that both leaders and governors say that they would like to improve further.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- improve the consistency and quality of teaching, learning and assessment, so that all pupils, particularly in key stage 2, make at least good progress in their reading, writing and mathematics
- continue to work with families and pupils to further improve rates of attendance and reduce persistent absence
- improve the teaching of phonics so that pupils' spelling and early reading and writing skills improve
- refine school improvement plans so that they are clear, precise and enable leaders and governors to increase accountability.

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

Lee Elliott
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, governors and a representative from the local authority. I accompanied senior leaders during observations in classrooms and together we reviewed and evaluated pupils' written work. I listened to a group of pupils read and spoke to other pupils and parents. I analysed the school's website and evaluated a wide range of additional documentation. This included the record of suitability checks on staff, safeguarding policies and associated files, in addition to records of pupils' attendance. I reviewed assessment information about pupils' attainment and progress, as well as leaders' action plans and evaluations. I considered 12 responses from members of staff who completed Ofsted's online staff questionnaire. Only two parents responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View; too few to take into account. No pupils responded to Ofsted's online pupil questionnaire.