

Northwood Primary School

Pendleton Road South, Darlington, County Durham DL1 2HF

Inspection dates

16–17 January 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher is uncompromising in her drive for excellence in all aspects of school life. She has boundless energy and passion for ensuring that pupils get the 'best deal'. She has created and nurtured a committed staff who feel valued and supported.
- Shrewd appointments to senior and subject leader roles have enabled the entire leadership team to excel. Their complementary skills ensure that leadership at all levels is excellent.
- Governors are highly skilled and ambitious for the school's future. They use their collective expertise to ensure that decision-making is measured and rooted in improving pupils' outcomes, both socially and academically.
- The strong safeguarding culture is well embedded. Staff are fully aware of the important role they play in keeping pupils safe. They are vigilant in reporting any concerns, and referrals to other to other agencies are timely.
- Pupils' absence is above average. Leaders impress upon parents, carers and pupils the importance of good attendance and punctuality. While recent improvements are noteworthy, there is still much to do.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work closely together. They know the pupils exceptionally well and this secures the warm and trusting relationships that exist in the school.
- Pupils behave well and are respectful of others. Pupils' movement around the school is calm and orderly and their attitudes to learning are positive. Thus, pupils are happy in school and say that they feel safe.
- Teachers plan thoughtful activities that engage all pupils. Occasionally, activities are not sufficiently demanding or do not build upon what pupils already know and can do effectively. When this happens, the pace of learning slows. This is particularly the case in key stage 1.
- Leaders have a strong curriculum intent that places heavy emphasis on developing pupils' technological skills. Detailed 'progression documents' provide excellent guidance to teachers of the important subject-specific knowledge and skills that are to be taught in each year group. This supports pupils' good outcomes in a range of subjects.
- Children in the early years thrive in this exceptionally well-led setting.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in key stage 1, by ensuring that:
 - pupils are challenged to think hard about their learning so that more pupils can achieve the expected and higher standards
 - there is greater emphasis upon widening pupils' vocabulary so that pupils become increasingly self-assured in reasoning and can explain their thoughts and opinions with confidence.
- Continue to work with parents to improve pupils' attendance and reduce levels of persistent absenteeism.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- In all aspects of her role, the headteacher's unstinting commitment to the school's mantra of 'growing success' shines through. Since her appointment, she has worked tirelessly to raise achievement and create a forward-thinking – and outward-facing – school. She is keen to forge new partnerships and to share good practice in her drive for excellence.
- She has appointed senior leaders that are equally ambitious and committed to securing further improvement. Collectively, they focus well as a team on improving teaching and raising standards. Their blend of skills ensures that all aspects of school life are exceptionally well led and next steps for improvement are precisely identified.
- Subject leaders are highly enthusiastic about their roles. They are knowledgeable and use their knowledge expertly to produce well-organised programmes of study. Such documents enable teachers to plan lessons that ensure that pupils acquire the knowledge needed to be successfully prepared for the next stage of their education.
- The special educational needs coordinator is a consummate professional. She is methodical in her approach and leaves no stone unturned to secure for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) an accurate diagnosis of need and appropriate support. At the same time, she is highly approachable and has established warm and trusting relationships between herself, pupils with SEND and their parents. As a result, increasing proportions of pupils are now receiving education, health and care plans and those parents who spoke to inspectors were highly complimentary about the support and guidance they receive.
- All staff are highly valued. They respond positively to the high expectations set for them and are appreciative of the high-quality training opportunities provided by leaders. As a result, this is a happy school where staff morale is high.
- Just over half of the pupils qualify for pupil premium funding. Leaders – including governors – act with due diligence to ensure that this funding is spent wisely. Every penny is accounted for and its impact on minimising the barriers to learning evaluated thoroughly. Leaders are resolute that the higher incidence of persistent absenteeism for disadvantaged pupils will not impact negatively on their achievements. This commitment is evidenced by improvements to disadvantaged pupils' progress over time.
- The headteacher has a very clear curriculum intent. It captures the rich engineering and technological heritage of the local area and is intuitive and responsive to the increasingly diverse community they serve. Detailed 'progression documents' identify precisely the subject-specific knowledge and skills required for pupils to be successful learners. A raft of visits and wonderful experiences enrich this further and lead to high levels of pupil engagement and interest in lessons.
- Leaders have ensured that the physical education (PE) and sport premium is used very effectively to promote high levels of pupil engagement in a range of sporting competitions and after-school clubs. It is also used to secure the sustainability of the PE curriculum. High-quality coaches are deployed to train and support teachers in a

range of different sporting disciplines, such as yoga and table tennis.

- When the school first joined the multi-academy trust, leaders received valuable support and guidance. Although leaders continue to receive input from the trust executive team, this is now at a strategic level and in recognition of the highly competent and capable leadership team.

Governance of the school

- Governors are highly skilled and committed to the school. They are highly ambitious for its future and they have recruited new governors with the right mix of skills and knowledge to support them in doing so.
- Governors carry out their roles very effectively and a review of the records of their minutes reflects the expert level of challenge, support and training afforded to school leaders.
- Governors fulfil their legal responsibilities with due diligence. They ensure that additional monies are well spent and evaluated thoroughly.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders complete detailed employment checks on staff. Leaders and governors review the record of these checks regularly.
- The designated safeguarding lead ensures that the school is a haven of security and support for all pupils, especially the most vulnerable. The level of care, support and guidance afforded to all pupils is heart-warming.
- All staff receive regular training to ensure that they are up to date with the latest legislative requirements. They are confident in their role and are fully aware of the important part they play in keeping children safe. All staff know the pupils well, which makes them highly perceptive to the slightest change in pupils' behaviour.
- It is clear from a review of written records that concerns are raised swiftly, and these are then forwarded to other agencies with the same urgency. Leaders demonstrate doggedness in the follow-up of any such concerns.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers and teaching assistants work exceptionally well together because of highly effective communication and detailed planning. Recent changes to the way in which teaching assistants are deployed make best use of their skills. This has improved the quality of interventions and classroom support and contributes to pupils' good outcomes.
- Staff in all year groups share their high expectations of pupils to be respectful and attentive in lessons and to take pride in the presentation of their work. In return, teachers work hard to use interesting and effective resources to engage all pupils, particularly boys. For the most part, teachers' planning is thoughtful and detailed, and

lessons build effectively upon what pupils already know and can do. Very occasionally, activities lack challenge and do not demand enough of pupils, particularly in key stage 1.

- The teaching of phonics is highly effective. Staff have good subject knowledge and there is a strong rapport with pupils, which supports high levels of engagement. Discrete lessons are fast-paced and full of enthusiasm, which contributes to pupils' excellent outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check, which are above the national average. Pupils are encouraged to use and apply their phonics skills outside the discrete lessons.
- Pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to their reading. They access a range of books from a range of authors and are heard to read regularly to improve their reading fluency.
- Leaders have changed their approach to the teaching of reading in key stage 2. There are now whole-class lessons that focus upon extending pupils' vocabulary, practising grammatical techniques and then completing comprehension activities. This is having a positive impact on pupils' outcomes in reading. In 2018, these were above the national average at the expected standard at the end of key stage 2. This approach is not yet employed in key stage 1.
- Teachers choose highly engaging texts as part of their wider approach to the teaching of writing. Pupils in all year groups are exposed to age-appropriate high-quality texts, which capture all pupils' interests and engagement, particularly those of boys. Pupils are expected to write in a range of styles and to present their work to a high standard. Pupils are expected to edit and improve their work, which they do willingly.
- Leaders have been using findings from educational research to adjust the emphasis of their teaching to provide pupils with frequent opportunities to secure their basic mathematical skills. As a result, in key stage 2, pupils' progress improved markedly in 2018 to be well above average. While this represents excellent progress, a review of pupils' work and lesson observations showed that pupils were less secure in their reasoning and problem-solving skills. This is consistent with the less-frequent opportunities pupils receive to explain their answers, which impacts upon pupils' self-assurance in explaining their answers with confidence and ease.
- Carefully planned programmes of study for subjects beyond English and mathematics ensure that pupils' subject-specific knowledge and skills are built sequentially. As a result, pupils' progress in a range of subjects is good. A review of pupils' work carried out by inspectors in geography and design and technology was particularly impressive.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are confident in their surroundings because of the strong relationships that exist in the school. Leaders have ensured that the school is a place of security for all pupils, particularly those who are most vulnerable. As a result, pupils say that they are safe and happy in school.

- Leaders place a high priority on promoting pupils' physical and mental well-being. They ensure that those pupils who need it have access to a range of additional services to provide the guidance and support they need. This is a strength of the school and is greatly appreciated by parents. As one parent told inspectors, 'I love this school. I don't want my child to leave!' This view is endorsed by all the parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, who would recommend the school to others.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They are aware of the different forms of bullying. Those pupils who spoke to inspectors were adamant that 'bullying doesn't really happen here.' They were equally confident that, should they have any concerns, they would be able to confide in any adult in the school who would act on their behalf.
- The current personal and social curriculum is fit for purpose and it prepares pupils for the next stage of their education effectively. However, leaders recognise some of its limitations, given the changing societal pressures pupils face. A new programme of study is under construction, which leaders believe will better represent the school's mission statement and ethos, and be more reflective of the community it serves. The rationale for this is clear but it is too early to judge its impact.
- A strong programme of assemblies and an engaging curriculum ensure that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is effective.
- Although leaders have worked determinedly to ensure that the conditions for learning are conducive to nurturing pupils' confidence, some pupils lack self-assurance. This is most noticeable when pupils are asked to explain their answers, to reason or to debate. Leaders recognise pupils need increasing opportunities to develop their speaking and listening skills further and extend their vocabulary.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Leaders effectively promote positive expectations of pupils' behaviour. Pupils are rewarded and praised for being helpful and considerate classmates and good citizens. The consistency with which this positive approach is applied ensures that pupils conduct themselves around school responsibly and are well mannered and polite. This belies some of the more challenging behaviours staff are required to manage from time to time. On the rare occasions that leaders have used fixed-period exclusions, these have been as a last resort.
- Leaders have used research findings to improve pupils' playtime experiences. They have invested heavily in 'fixed' playground equipment and have reorganised playtimes to allow pupils maximum access to it. This leads to lively and harmonious playtimes and has also led to a reduction in the incidents of boisterous behaviour.
- Pupils' absence rates are above average, as is the proportion of pupils who are persistently away from school. Leaders are disappointed by this and work tirelessly to ensure that parents are aware of the importance of full attendance and punctuality. They use a range of rewards and sanctions as part of their attendance strategy to incentivise improvements. Most recently, the 'hot chocolate' club has proved effective in increasing by one fifth the proportion of pupils achieving full attendance in a two-

week period. Despite such efforts, pupils' attendance remains an area for further improvement.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Over a fifth of all pupils join the school at times other than those expected. Leaders use a highly detailed tracking system to maintain their grasp on pupils' progress and attainment. Increasing proportions of pupils from the Traveller community, children whose families are seeking asylum and refugees make year-on-year comparisons of pupils' outcomes difficult. That said, leaders have a 'no-excuses' mindset, and their mantra of 'growing success' ensures that pupils from all starting points make good progress.
- Outcomes at the end of key stage 2 have improved markedly over time. In 2018, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in combined reading, writing and mathematics was above the national average. Overall, this represents excellent progress from pupils' starting points. However, the pace of pupils' progress in key stage 1 is more variable.
- Highly effective support and precise diagnoses of need ensure that pupils with SEND make good progress. Consequently, the vast majority of pupils with SEND can access the subject-specific knowledge and skills associated with their age-related expectations.
- Disadvantaged pupils account for just over half of all pupils. Leaders recognise that a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils are regularly absent from school but they use additional funding to ensure that any missed learning is caught up quickly. As a result, disadvantaged pupils' outcomes are good overall, and their progress is improving.
- Leaders check the progress and attainment of pupils from the Traveller community carefully. They ensure that, when pupils are in school, there is a strong focus upon embedding transferable skills. Productive links with parents are helping to maximise pupils' attainment.
- Historical assessment information indicates that boys' skills on entry are lower than those of girls. Teachers are thoughtful in the activities they plan to ensure that all pupils are engaged in learning. Leaders check boys' progress meticulously to ensure that any differences on entry are diminished by the time pupils leave the school. When this is not the case, it is linked to other and additional needs and the timing of pupils' transfer into school.
- Detailed study programmes for subjects beyond English and mathematics ensure that pupils acquire subject-specific knowledge and skills effectively. As a result, pupils' outcomes in a range of subjects are good. Pupils' successes in geography and design and technology are particularly impressive and are testament to the strong curriculum intent of the headteacher.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- The early years leader is inspirational. She is highly knowledgeable and has a strong understanding of the learning and emotional needs of young children. She has a clear rationale for the curriculum and has the support of the headteacher to implement it. As a result, she has created a vibrant and exciting learning environment that is filled with lots of interesting activities that entice children to explore the world around them.
- Outcomes are excellent. The vast majority of children join the school with skills that are below those typically expected for their age, particularly in learning associated with communication and language. Typically, boys' starting points are lower than those of girls. Leaders are mindful of this information and ensure that activities are planned to diminish any gaps in children's learning and to enhance their communication skills. As a result, by the time children leave Reception, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development is broadly in line with the national average and any gaps that exist between boys and girls have been significantly reduced.
- The local authority speech and language base is situated in the early years and is run by school staff. It is especially effective in supporting individual children to overcome any language difficulties that they may have. Such is its success that staff from the unit offer outreach work to other schools within the local authority.
- Strong and positive relationships with parents are formed quickly by welcoming staff. This is supporting parents to become increasingly involved in their child's learning and dispels quickly any inherent anxieties associated with children starting school for the first time.
- Adults set high expectations for children to be respectful of their environment and of each other. High levels of respect create a haven for children. Children are happy in their setting and explore and interact with each other with ease. They share and take turns and are confident in talking to adults about their learning.
- Outdoor learning is planned creatively to maximise opportunities for children to explore and investigate their surroundings. Children access the large play equipment and show high levels of curiosity. For example, a group of children were highly engaged in using salt to melt ice blocks and free the dinosaurs that were frozen inside them.
- Teaching is consistently strong across both Nursery and Reception classes. Teachers skilfully plan a range of interesting activities that excite, engage and motivate children. Every opportunity is seized to reinforce children's early literacy and numeracy skills. As a result, children quickly acquire skills to make very strong progress.

School details

Unique reference number	142462
Local authority	Darlington
Inspection number	10059023

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	387
Appropriate authority	Lingfield Education Trust
Chair	David Campbell
Headteacher	Zoe Beach
Telephone number	01325 267 222
Website	www.northwoodprimary.org.uk
Email address	admin@northwoodprimary.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- This is the school's first inspection since becoming part of Lingfield Education Trust.
- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- Over half of all pupils in the school are disadvantaged. This is almost twice the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND – and with an education, health and care plan – is above the national average.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage, with increasing numbers of pupils from the Traveller community, as well as refugees and asylum seekers.
- The school operates a breakfast club and an after-school club.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team visited teaching sessions across a range of subjects from Nursery to Year 6. The vast majority of these visits were conducted together with members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, senior leaders, governors and representatives of the trust. Inspectors looked at work in pupils' books and spoke to pupils formally and informally about their learning. Inspectors also heard pupils read.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents provided by the school, including assessment information and its self-evaluation report. The school's records relating to safeguarding were also checked.
- There were 22 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View. The inspectors took account of these, along with the 17 free-text responses and 135 responses to Parent View which had been captured within the last 365 days. Inspectors spoke to several parents at the start of the school day. Staff survey results were reviewed.

Inspection team

Diane Buckle, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Gill Wild

Ofsted Inspector

Cathy Lee

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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