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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mrs Jane Bushell
Headteacher
Bedlington West End First School
Ridge Terrace
Bedlington
Northumberland
NE22 6EB

Dear Mrs Bushell

Short inspection of Bedlington West End First School

Following my visit to the school on 28 February 2019, 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 February 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school is successful, happy and welcoming. One parent accurately commented that 'the staff's dedication and obvious pride in their school is clear, and their compassion and care is sincerely appreciated.' Working alongside the skilled and experienced deputy headteacher, you have set a tone of persistent and relentless change in order to provide the very best for pupils. This has been in the face of potentially unsettling and distracting local school reorganisation discussions. Everyone has kept their 'eye on the ball' to ensure the strongest possible outcomes for pupils. Each child is treated as an individual and their needs are effectively addressed. The school has maintained its creativity and innovation in curriculum provision. One governor came close to capturing the ethos of the school when describing it as somewhat 'bohemian'.

All staff share the same vision to see pupils thrive and become 'citizens of the future'. There is a tangible sense of purpose, energy and uncompromising ambition to see pupils flourish academically and in their all-round development. Teamwork and collegiality are the hallmarks of all adults in school. There is a sense of agitation and restlessness to challenge and question each other continually. High levels of trust enable significant professional conversations that typify a thirst to improve. The response of staff to new ideas or addressing any emerging areas of concern is quick, thorough and effective.

In the last inspection, leaders were asked to give more opportunities for children in the early years to develop the creative and technological aspects of their skills in a

consistent way. There is now an exciting, innovative and rapidly evolving early years provision. Following the opening of a purpose-built nursery and pre-school building this year, there is a seamless transition through early years from 2-year-olds into the Nursery and Reception classes. This is built upon sturdy and purposeful partnership working between the school and the West End Pre-School. There has been a clear and successful commitment to developing the quality of indoor and outdoor provision, especially in the Reception classes. Leaders know that there is further work to undertake in the new-build. This will ensure that the organisation of effective and purposeful indoor and outdoor spaces and available resources underpin children's progress.

Inspectors also asked leaders to improve governors' skills and knowledge to ensure that they had a clearer insight into the strengths and needs of the school. There has been a detailed analysis of governors' professional skills, underpinned by a clarity in the vision of the school. Recruitment of new governors and a redeployment of roles and tasks have resulted in a dynamic and reinvigorated governing body. Governors demonstrate a rapidly developing ability to challenge and support leaders. This is built upon a raft of first-hand information from purposeful links to key areas of school. There are now well-planned, recorded formal school visits, which provide governors with direct first-hand experiences of what goes on in school. Governors are crystal clear about how they will ensure that they become even more effective. This includes the consideration of how to develop and influence the strategic direction of the school.

Leaders are fully involved in the annual calendar of monitoring and evaluation. They undertake detailed lesson observations, analyse work in books and lead meetings to discuss pupils' progress. These rigorous and robust systems ensure that school development planning is based on accurate and perceptive self-evaluation. The role of the senior leadership team is pivotal in gathering and driving change and improvements in English and mathematics. There is still some work to do on developing pupils' skills in reasoning activities in mathematics. Subject leaders discussed with me the ongoing review of teaching in subjects other than English and mathematics. They agreed that the full effect of the review was yet to be seen as they had uncovered some repetition of content and resources. There were also a few gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. Actions to address these issues will be complete soon.

Safeguarding is effective.

The culture of keeping pupils safe and putting them at the heart of the inclusive, friendly school community is evident. Pupils categorically state that no bullying happens at school at any time. They have a good understanding of the causes of bullying and its different forms. Pupils' behaviour is good. They know how to stay safe out of school and explained carefully to me the 'dos and do nots' of e-safety.

Pupils report that they feel safe all of the time. They have full trust in their teachers and teaching assistants who look after them. Pupils' excellent caring attitudes were reflected in their wish to have the 'friendship-stop' reinstated after recent building

work. In the responses to the inspection questionnaire, every parent would recommend the school to another parent and stated that their child was safe.

The school site is secure and signing-in procedures are robust. The school's single central record is accurate and contains all the relevant information. Checks on the suitability of adults to work with children are effective. Records are maintained and reviewed efficiently by the school business manager. The designated safeguarding governor undertakes regular checks on all statutory documentation. Designated safeguarding leaders fulfil their role with great responsibility and attention to detail. The school's use of a comprehensive and detailed system to record concerns online ensures that every piece of information, no matter how small, is considered carefully and not lost. The work of the inclusion mentor ensures that pupil welfare and well-being is a central pillar of the school's ethos.

Inspection findings

- There is no doubt that the school is fully committed to the well-being and safety of all its pupils. I read many positive comments from parents during the inspection. For example, one described the school as 'a nurturing and positive environment for young children to learn in' and another said, 'Staff are concerned with, not just the attainment of pupils, but with the overall character building of the young people in their care; they are encouraged to be confident, kind and polite children.' Following my visit, I concur with these views. The school has invested in a full-time inclusion mentor. This enables valuable support for vulnerable pupils and their families through work with individuals or groups. The mentor also signposts families to other sources of help and support. Pupils are settled, confident and highly motivated to learn. This is, in part, because they feel secure and rightly feel important. One pupil explained to me that teachers always pay attention to what pupils say and that pupils are not ignored. Any potential barriers to learning are addressed and removed.
- Children in the early years are fulfilling their full potential. Staff are becoming skilled in their role in children's learning, especially during child-initiated creative play. The early years leader has worked extremely hard to ensure that activities and resources found in the Reception class outdoor area are open-ended and exciting. Children's curiosity and inquisitiveness, despite the inclement weather on inspection day, was a key feature of their engagement in learning. There are high levels of co-operative learning and children display good levels of maturity. There are significant strengths in the partnership working arrangement with the private early years provider, seamlessly sharing the brand new, large open space for nursery and pre-school children. An exciting future lies ahead as changes and new ways of working become embedded and gather momentum. There is still work to complete to ensure that the quality of the outdoor learning environment matches that in Reception. Further refinements to the organisation of the large indoor space also need to be implemented as soon as possible.
- Leaders, at all levels, play a key role in improving the quality of teaching and the richness and depth of the school curriculum. They make effective use of external expertise and support. Leaders have ensured that comprehensive and well-planned systems are in place for all leaders to evaluate the quality of teaching

and learning. This is especially the case for the leaders of mathematics and English, affectionately known as the 'curriculum terriers'. Leaders acknowledge that recent efforts to provide many opportunities for pupils to develop skills in mathematical reasoning are not yet embedded. Further work is needed in this area.

- The innovative curriculum is well supported by a range of trips and visits. Dedicated 'theme weeks' are also built into curriculum provision. During the inspection, many pupils from each year group arrived at school with a model of a dinosaur, its nest or eggs in various forms. This was part of the themed week for writing, the whole school using dinosaurs as an inspiration. Pupils and teachers are clear about the key characteristics that will allow pupils to become successful learners. Each characteristic is known and understood by pupils. They include being creative, taking risks, persevering and communicating well. As part of the school's quest to continually improve, an extensive curriculum review is almost complete. Further work is needed to ensure that pupils have access to a broad range of curricular resources and that any repetition of content is eradicated. Currently not all pupils acquire age-appropriate skills and knowledge as they move through school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- recent changes and innovations in early years provision are strengthened and embedded, including in the indoor and outdoor learning environments
- you provide pupils with regular opportunities to explain and justify their thinking in mathematical reasoning activities
- your extensive and ongoing review of teaching and learning in creative and foundation subjects results in pupils acquiring age-appropriate skills and knowledge as they move through school.

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

Yours sincerely

Phil Scott
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and the deputy headteacher. I held a meeting with the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. I met with the school's business manager and held a telephone conversation with the school's improvement adviser. Alongside you, I visited lessons in each key stage and reviewed a sample of pupils'

workbooks. I spoke to pupils about their work and their views of the school. I observed behaviour at breaktimes and considered a range of documents relating to safeguarding. I examined the school development plan and the school's evaluation of its own performance. I scrutinised records of the evaluation of teaching and learning and of current pupils' progress and attainment. I analysed the published data of statutory assessments for 2016, 2017 and 2018. I reviewed the 23 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, 22 free-text responses from parents and the 20 responses to the staff questionnaire. In addition, I scrutinised the school's website.