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Mr Steve Bowler  
Principal  
Monkton Junior School  
Dame Flora Robson Avenue  
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Dear Mr Bowler

### **Short inspection of Monkton Junior School**

Following my visit to the school on 1 May 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 April 2015.

### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. A recent period of uncertainty and turbulence in the leadership of the school had a negative effect on the standards of education. However, since your appointment, the improvements you have made have had an immediate and profound effect on reshaping the values and ethos of the school, and have led to considerable improvements. Such is the immediate effect of your leadership that despite the uncertainty of the past, Monkton Junior School is a happy place to learn. Staff are motivated and committed, and deliver exciting lessons. As one pupil said, 'It is a great school, where the staff care for us and always help us to learn.'

In 2018, as a result of the improvements you have made, an above-average proportion of pupils attained the expected standard at the end of key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics. This was a dramatic improvement. Your focus on teaching the basic skills of English and mathematics has clearly had a positive effect on improving pupils' attainment. You are keen to prevent any narrowing of the curriculum, and have placed a renewed focus on enhancing and broadening pupils' learning. This is beginning to show marked results, particularly in pupils' enjoyment and their positive attitudes towards their learning, and in their improved attendance. While you have begun to make changes to the wider curriculum, it remains in its earliest stages of implementation and is not reflected across the full range of subjects.

Pupils talk enthusiastically of the opportunities they now have to visit a range of places to support their learning. For example, Year 5 had visited a museum in York

as part of their work to study the Vikings. Some older pupils explained how their trip to an outdoor education centre, to do adventurous and outward-bound activities, was 'so cool!' and helped them to show how brave they were. Most importantly, pupils talked enthusiastically about their musical version of 'The Greatest Showman', in which they all performed. This had clearly been a highlight of the year and was universally spoken about with pride by staff, pupils, parents and carers alike. This event clearly has had a positive effect beyond the walls of the school, and has acted to bring the whole school community together behind the new motto of: 'Inspire, Achieve, Empower.'

You, and governors, have an uncompromising determination to raise academic standards further. You have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses because of the improvements you have made to assessment and monitoring processes. As a result, you are gathering more accurate information about how well pupils are learning and this is ensuring that you can focus on the right priorities for further improvement. You recognise that pupils' reading attainment has been slower to improve than that seen in mathematics or writing. This affects pupils' progress in reading, which has remained significantly below average over time. You have plans already in place to tackle this area. This has led to a recent marked improvement in current pupils' reading attainment, which was above the national average at the expected standard in 2018.

Staff value the focused training and professional development you have provided to improve their practice. The effect of this training can be seen in pupils' work and what they say about how teachers help them in lessons. Pupils say that teachers always help them to learn. Pupils said that when teachers ask them questions during their learning and help them to see where they have made errors, this helps them to improve straight away. In line with the school's policy, teachers' feedback in science books was seen to focus pupils' attention on the effect of them thinking like a scientist in their explanation of a fair test.

At the time of the last inspection, leaders were asked to ensure that pupils had sufficient opportunities to consider the cultural diversity found at both a national and global level. Pupils told me that they cared deeply about all of the people in the world. They referred to their learning about other cultures and religions and said that the beliefs of others are interesting to them. For example, they said, 'We learned all about Muslims and their symbols and stories so we respect them; it's fine to believe what you want.' The effect of this work was shown in their horrified response to the suggestion that anyone in school could be racist and their insistence that, 'No one ever gets called anything nasty, that never goes on here.'

You are vigilant to the health and well-being of pupils, and provide a range of activities to address this. Sports clubs and other active after-school activities are on offer. Pupils love what the school calls the 'daily mile', where together with staff they run or walk around the outside of the grounds during breaks until they have done a mile. Pupils know that this keeps them healthy and they enjoy the challenge. The healthy fruit snacks which you provide and the tasty school dinners ensure that pupils have healthy options for eating. Pupils can explain what a healthy balanced diet is, and use their knowledge from learning in science when explaining why it is important to stay healthy.

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Training is of high quality and is regularly refreshed so that staff are confident in their knowledge and quickly respond if concerns are raised by a pupil. As a result, there is an evident culture of safeguarding in place and everyone plays their part to keep pupils safe.

All of the correct checks have been made on staff who are working directly with children and the record-keeping is well managed, accurate and securely held. Certain staff and governors are trained in safer recruitment, which has ensured that the many new staff who have recently joined the school have all been rigorously vetted to ensure that they are fit to work with children.

Leaders and governors ensure that all of the school policies and procedures relating to safeguarding are detailed and up to date, and are known and understood by all employees. Arrangements for access to the school are carefully controlled so that a good balance is maintained between being open and friendly to visitors and ensuring that pupils are safe and secure. Those parents who I talked to are very satisfied that the school is safe. They praised the staff for their detailed knowledge of their children and the care that staff take of the children.

Pupils spoken with said that they feel safe in school, and that behaviour is good and any instances of bullying or arguments are rare. When disagreements do happen, pupils say that staff react quickly and always sort things out well. The pupils spoken with all said that they had a special adult in school who they trusted and would go to if they were worried. Pupils are taught to take responsibility for their own safety, and how to identify and respond to potential risks when they are outside of school. They are taught about online safety and understand what to do if they encounter something they are worried or concerned about while they are using their mobile phones or other devices.

Pupils are given positions of responsibility in school, such as buddies who help out at playtime. Year 6 pupils can become prefects and two boys on duty at the time of the inspection told me how they help everyone to be well mannered and supervise entrances.

## **Inspection findings**

- Leaders have worked hard to ensure that good attendance habits are established as soon as pupils start school. Pupils enjoy a range of special prizes, rewards and certificates, which encourage them to be in school every day. Parents are also much better informed about their children's attendance, through regular letters that remind them about the positive effect good attendance has on their child's education. As a result, absence rates have fallen over the last three years so that they are now in line with schools of a similar context, and much closer to national averages. The number of pupils who are persistently absent from school has also fallen dramatically over the last two years. The school's current attendance

records indicate further improvements could bring rates of persistent absence to below national figures by the end of this year.

- Parents are very supportive of the school and are very pleased with the improvements they have seen since you joined the school as its new principal. They now feel that communication is better, and they feel more included in their child's education. Parents spoken to during the inspection and those who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were very positive about the school. Comments included, 'The new head has made quick and positive changes to the school in the short time he has been here.' Another said, 'Communication with parents has significantly improved and [we are] kept up to date with everything happening in school. The school is going from strength to strength under the guidance of the new principal.' Parents also commented on the caring nature of staff. One said, 'Staff have been amazing to [my son], showing caring and compassion. The staff are always available if I have any concerns and are always there at the end of the phone or in person.'
- Leaders have rightly identified improvements in pupils' progress in the core skills of reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' progress over the last three years has been variable between subjects, and sometimes significantly below the national averages. However, considerable improvements in pupils' attainment in mathematics and writing, at the end of key stage 2 in 2018, led to average progress rates. Although there was also a similarly marked rise in pupils' reading attainment in 2018, this had less effect on improving pupils' progress rates due to higher prior attainment at key stage 1.
- In 2018, pupils' progress in reading remained significantly below that seen nationally. Leaders make no excuses for this and have developed a clear and detailed plan for the further improvement of reading. Pupils now read more regularly both in school and at home, and use reading cards to track their progress. Pupils talk enthusiastically about how interesting work in other lessons, such as history, makes them want to read and learn more. This can be seen in their increasingly diverse choice of books. The most able readers are given challenging texts to read, and their teachers expect them to give detailed answers to complex questions during lessons. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), who require more help to read, are given support in small groups. These sessions are led by expert staff who use a phonics-based approach to ensure that pupils improve their knowledge of the sounds letters make. Despite these improvements, the progress of pupils with SEND and those with middle prior attainment is lower than that of other pupils in the school. Leaders know further improvements are necessary to ensure that all pupils make rapid progress with their reading.
- Middle leadership at the school has also experienced recent major changes. New leaders for English and for the teaching and learning of pupils with SEND have begun work to formulate action plans that reflect the focus on the school's areas for development. Middle leaders are being supported in their role by the principal and vice-principal, who work closely alongside their new leaders, providing training and mentoring. Middle leaders say that they also receive valuable support from the local authority and from links to a local outstanding school. As a result, middle leaders' plans are now clearly focused and show the use of more

accurate assessment information to target particular groups of pupils for intervention support. However, it is too early to see the effect of this work on accelerating pupils' rates of progress, particularly in reading.

- The wider curriculum is another area where leaders are beginning to make improvements. Leaders were clear in their assessment that there had previously been a narrowing of the curriculum in response to falling standards. Older pupils also mentioned that there had previously been more of a focus on mathematics and English, while recognising that lessons are now becoming more interesting. The effect of the changes was, for example, observed in a Year 3 writing lesson where pupils were creating a leaflet about keeping their local beach clean. The lesson blended together previous learning in science about materials for recycling, geographical knowledge and writing technique. Pupils were enthusiastic about writing down and sharing ideas from their previous learning. Scrutiny of the pupils' science workbooks, where longer-term development work is coming to fruition, showed work of a high standard. Indications were that this was resulting from a practical approach to learning, with clear progression in knowledge being obvious from one year group to another. Leaders have not yet been able to embed these changes so that learning in English and mathematics is supported in all year groups by links to learning in the other subjects.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the teaching of reading continues to improve so that all pupils, particularly those with SEND and those with middle prior attainment, make more rapid progress from their starting points to ensure that pupils' progress in reading by the end of key stage 2 is at least in line with national averages
- the leaders for mathematics and English and pupils with SEND continue to develop their use of assessment information more effectively to plan support, which enables underachieving pupils to catch up in their learning
- recent changes to the curriculum are embedded so that pupils' learning in English and mathematics is supported by links to other subjects which engage and interest pupils in their learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Colin Lofthouse  
**Ofsted Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, I held meetings with you and the acting vice-principal, several members of the governing body and the board of trustees, and a representative of the local authority. I scrutinised several documents relating to the school's safeguarding and recruitment procedures, including a review of the single central record of checks which are required for anyone working with children. I reviewed a range of information about pupils' outcomes, attendance, behaviour and safety. I also scrutinised the school's self-evaluation documents and the school improvement plan. I met with middle leaders for reading, writing, mathematics, science and SEND. We observed learning together in Years 3 to Year 6. While in lessons, I talked to pupils about their learning. I listened to Year 3 and Year 6 pupils read, and looked at their reading records. I talked to a group of pupils about their learning and experiences. I looked at pupils' work, particularly their science, reading and their wider curriculum books. I took account of the eight comments made by the parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and their written text comments. I also considered the 10 responses to the staff survey.