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Mrs Caroline Addison
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Addison

Short inspection of Benfieldside Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 27 September 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.**

Since your appointment as headteacher in April 2018, you have taken swift action to begin to address some of the school's priorities. Your appointment followed a period of temporary interim headship arrangements in the previous year. You have strengthened safeguarding arrangements, restructured the leadership team, developed the learning environment and created a detailed self-evaluation document and school plan which identifies relevant priorities. Your plans clearly recognise the need to improve pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics and to maintain the gains made in 2018 in phonics and early years outcomes. The restructured leadership team, established since September 2018, places the school on a stable platform to drive your planned improvements.

The strengths in pupils' behaviour identified at the previous inspection have been maintained. Leaders and staff have created a friendly and caring learning environment. Pupils move around school in an orderly fashion and they cooperate well in lessons. Their behaviour at playtimes is good and they engage well in the range of physical and social activities available. Along with your inclusion manager, you have sharpened the approaches to improving attendance levels. This is having a positive impact overall, although you recognise there is still more to do to reduce persistent absence levels further.

The areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection have been partially addressed. The first area for improvement was to raise attainment. In some subjects, there is evidence that this has been achieved. For example, following three years where pupils' outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check were below the national average, there has been a substantial improvement in your school's provisional results in 2018. However, pupils' reading attainment has remained below the national average by the end of both Year 2 and Year 6. Disadvantaged pupils' attainment in reading is particularly weak. Generally, pupils' attainment in English grammar, punctuation and spelling, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 has been broadly in line with the national average. However, your school's 2018 provisional results show a substantial dip in attainment in reading, mathematics and English grammar, punctuation and spelling results.

Children generally start your school at standards below that typical for their age. Your assessments indicate that a high proportion make strong progress from their starting points. As a result, in 2018 there has been an improvement in the proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of Reception. However, the proportion of children who achieve a good level of development has remained below the national average for the last four years.

Another area for improvement at the time of the previous inspection was to ensure that there are specific, measurable, rigorous targets for pupils' attainment in the school's plan for the future that are regularly checked against pupils' work and progress. Leaders have created a 2018/19 plan with relevant priorities and approaches to measuring impact. A monitoring schedule supports this to check for impact. This well-structured approach is relatively new and it is too early to discern the impact of this system.

Safeguarding is effective.

Since your appointment, you have taken steps to improve the effectiveness of safeguarding in school. Consequently, there is a strong safeguarding culture at your school. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. One area that you have worked on is ensuring that relevant checks for all staff and governors are in place and recorded appropriately. The documentation supporting safe recruitment is secure. Staff and governors receive regular training, so they know how to keep pupils safe and understand the safeguarding procedures and their responsibilities. You and your staff work effectively with parents and other agencies to support vulnerable pupils and their families. You show a determined approach to ensure that the appropriate support is provided where needed. Improvements to the building, such as creating a more secure access to the main entrance, have further improved the site security. Parents who responded to the Ofsted survey, Parent View, were very positive about how the school ensures that their children are happy and safe.

Inspection findings

- The deputy headteacher, who is also the subject leader for English, has acted to successfully improve pupils' writing outcomes and, more recently, pupils' phonics outcomes. By the end of Year 6, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard and greater depth in writing is broadly in line with the national average.
- Training to improve the teaching of phonics has generally had a positive effect. This has recently resulted in pupils' outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check improving substantially. Leaders identify that there is further work to be done to ensure a greater consistency in phonics teaching and further training is planned for this term. However, while phonics outcomes have improved, pupils' reading attainment by the end of Year 2 remains below the national average.
- There have been some recent strategies to increase the profile of reading across school. For example, the key stage 2 library has been developed and a library created in key stage 1.
- You have introduced some initiatives to improve key stage 2 pupils' reading outcomes. There is some early evidence that the approach of regular reading with online quizzes, introduced last year in Year 3 and Year 4, is helping some pupils to catch up. You have now started this approach in Year 5. In September, a new approach to developing reading comprehension was started with Year 6. However, during our visits to lessons and when listening to pupils read, sometimes learning time was not being used effectively and some pupils were reading books that were not well matched to their abilities. Overall, there is more to be done to improve the consistency of the quality of teaching and assessment of reading and to improve pupils' attainment in this subject.
- The school's 2018 provisional key stage 2 results were much lower than you expected. While leaders have analysed what the factors were, there is a need to ensure that pupils' progress and attainment levels improve to be at least in line with national averages by the end of this year. Leaders expressed a determination to ensure that this is the case and have set challenging targets for pupils' outcomes.
- The recently appointed assistant headteacher also has leadership responsibilities for mathematics and assessment. He has acted to support the teaching of mathematics, including the introduction of a range of resources to support the mathematics curriculum. He continues to review the effect of these resources and has plans to further refine the teaching of reasoning and number work. Generally, by the end of Year 6, pupils' progress and attainment in mathematics have compared well to the national average. However, in 2018 the provisional Year 6 results show that there was a fall in progress and attainment.
- Leaders have worked to refine the school's system for recording pupils' progress. These changes aim to improve leaders' and staff's use of available pupil progress and attendance information. Training is planned for this term to enhance staff skills in using the refined system.
- In 2017, overall attendance levels were too low and persistent absence levels were too high. Leaders' analysis found that this had a negative impact on pupils' learning. A structured approach to improve attendance, led by the headteacher

and inclusion manager, is beginning to reap benefits. As a result, overall attendance is improving and persistent absence is falling. However, leaders recognise that there is more to do to bring these measures in line with national averages.

- In 2018, improvements to the proportion of children achieving a good level of development ensured that more children were ready to start Year 1. However, the proportions of children working at the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics remains below the national average. Leaders are committed to improving the learning opportunities for children in early years. For example, recent developments to the outdoor learning areas provide greater opportunities to develop children's learning in the outdoors.
- Governors have taken steps to create a leadership team to meet the school's needs. For example, they showed perseverance in the selection of a headteacher and they have supported the leadership restructure to create an assistant headteacher post. They have an overall understanding of the school's priorities and actions that leaders are undertaking to address these. However, they have not held leaders closely to account for pupils' outcomes and the effect of key funding, such as the pupil premium funding. Some governors are about to start to meet with leaders for English and mathematics to further develop their understanding of leaders' work to improve pupils' outcomes in these subjects. This increased governor involvement is at an early stage of development. The involvement of the safeguarding governor is more developed. She has worked closely with you to ensure a strong safeguarding culture and procedures are in place.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' progress and attainment in reading improves so that the proportion of pupils working at the expected and higher standards at least matches the national averages by the end of Year 2 and Year 6
- pupils' attainment by the end of Year 6 in mathematics and English grammar, punctuation and spelling, at least matches the national average
- the focus on improving attendance is maintained so that levels of persistent absence reduce to at least the national average
- children' progress in early years improves further, so that more children reach the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics, thereby increasing the proportion who are ready to start Year 1
- recent changes to the leadership team are embedded so that the planned school improvements are implemented successfully and checked for impact
- the role of governors develops further so that they hold leaders to account effectively.

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

Michael Reeves
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I discussed the work of the school with you, your deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher, the leader for early years and the inclusion manager. I observed and spoke with pupils during playtime and at other times during the day. I held a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. My discussions with four governors, including the chair of the governing body, provided me with additional information. I considered school documentation, assessment information, policies and information posted on the school website. I considered the 18 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, the 12 responses to the pupil survey and the 11 responses to the staff survey. Along with you, I visited six classes to observe teaching and learning. I listened to pupils read within lessons and individually. I looked at pupils' phonics and English work to help evaluate the quality of teaching and learning over time. I considered information relating to safeguarding, attendance, behaviour and bullying.