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Mr Anthony Wright
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Wright

Short inspection of New Hartley First School

Following my visit to the school on 15 June 2016, 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 September 2010.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Senior leaders acted very quickly in response to a decline in standards at the end of key stage 1 in 2015.

You have created a very caring and nurturing school in which the well-being of every child is paramount. Those parents and pupils who spoke to me were overwhelmingly positive about the work of the school. Pupils, who had only recently started at the school, said they were made to feel very welcome and settled in quickly. Pupils enjoy school and are happy to attend. They are eager to learn. Pupils behave very well in lessons and at less-structured times of the school day. They behaved very well on the day of the inspection when the school held a father's day lunch; many dads joined their children for lunch and in the playground during the midday break. Leaders have successfully addressed the areas for improvement which were identified by the inspector at the time of the last inspection. Pupils are now given plentiful opportunities to practise their literacy, numeracy and information and communications technology skills across the curriculum. Pupils' work is marked in accordance with the school's marking policy. Leaders and teachers know, and provide focused support for, those pupils who are not making sufficient progress and are in danger of falling behind.

Senior leaders and governors know the school's strengths and areas for development well and take carefully considered actions in response to emerging areas of concern; for example, in the very judicious recruitment of new teaching staff. Similarly, your decision to deploy a qualified teacher to support disadvantaged pupils is paying dividends. These pupils are now making faster progress.

You are becoming increasingly successful at addressing the needs of the most able pupils. Parents have noticed a difference. They told me that their children's behaviour has improved at school because they are more challenged by, and as a result more interested in, the work that is set for them. They are making good progress.

You have quite rightly identified, and are addressing, the school's key areas for development in terms of pupils' progress in writing and mathematics. You are working hard in school to embed the new systems and procedures to check the standards pupils reach and the progress pupils make, but acknowledge this is an area for further development.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, teachers and support staff take appropriate and timely actions to support vulnerable pupils who are at risk of harm and ensure that they are kept safe. Staff are vigilant and aware of the potential risks to pupils. As a result, both parents and pupils agree that the school keeps them safe. Pupils are aware of the forms that bullying can take, say it does not happen but 'know' that it would be dealt with effectively by adults in school if it did occur. The business manager has taken assertive action to increase the proportion of pupils who attend school every day. As a result, pupils' attendance is rising and the number of pupils who are classed as 'persistently absent' is falling.

You have ensured that the day-to-day safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. However, leaders acknowledge that some administrative aspects must be sharpened. For example, some policies (which had recently been reviewed and ratified by the governing body) were out of date on the school's website at the beginning of the inspection.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have a clear programme of checking and observing the quality of teaching and learning in the school. Leaders give constructive feedback to teachers and ensure that they are supported to improve their practice. Leaders recognise that the deployment of the teaching assistant workforce is an area for development and have allocated this task to a member of the senior management team. Leaders have also correctly identified that the work of the school's middle leaders in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning is an area for development.
- Leaders have made progress in establishing new systems and procedures to assess the achievement of pupils. However, a check on pupils' work in books during the inspection revealed some inaccurate assessments of standards and progress. In these instances, pupils have achieved more than they are being given credit for achieving. Assessment information is not always accurate because there is insufficient checking of assessment information in school and with external partners.

- A check on pupils' workbooks carried out with senior leaders confirmed that most pupils are currently making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. The provision for disadvantaged pupils is making a difference and they are making good progress. In some classes, the most able pupils are making accelerated progress. They are challenged to do their very best and to think really deeply about their learning. These pupils are rarely 'off task.'
- The provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, although in a period of transition from one coordinator to another, is strong. Parents are very pleased with the care given to their children and the timeliness of the support that is offered to pupils, parents and their wider families.
- Children make good progress in the early years. They are more than ready for the increased demands of the Year 1 curriculum at the end of their year in the Reception class. Children in the early years have very strong personal development and social skills. For example, during the inspection, two children wanted to be the shopkeeper in the outdoor shopping centre. One three-year-old said to the other, 'Excuse me, I have to be the shopkeeper.' The other was happy to oblige and became a shopper instead.
- Governors are very knowledgeable about the school's published assessment information. They operate on a strategic level but increase their knowledge of the school through joint activities with senior leaders. For example, by attending sessions at which pupils' workbooks are checked.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- assessment information in relation to the standards pupils reach and the progress pupils make is more reliable through internal and external checks
- teaching assistants are deployed effectively in lessons to have a greater impact on pupils' progress
- middle leaders are given the time and support necessary to develop the leadership of the subjects and areas for which they have responsibility.

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

Yours sincerely

Belita Scott
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I discussed the work of the school with you, the deputy headteacher, the leader of the early years, the business manager and six governors, including the chair of the governing body. I checked a range of documentation including an evaluation of the school's effectiveness and the current improvement plan. I examined information about pupils' achievement, attendance and behavioural incidents. I considered external evaluations of aspects of the school's work, minutes of meetings of the governing body and the 24 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View). I visited most classes to observe teaching, learning and assessment, mostly alongside you and the deputy headteacher. I checked the progress made by pupils in their workbooks, talked formally to a group of six pupils and talked more informally to pupils in lessons about their learning.