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Mr Reuben Anderson
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Anderson

Short inspection of Stead Lane Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 30 January 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 June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have been determined to deal rigorously with any aspects of underperformance. Supported by a strong team of leaders, you have ensured that improvements in the quality of teaching and learning are quickly accelerating the rates of progress of current pupils across the school.

You have reacted quickly following disappointing results in the key stage 2 statutory assessments in 2017. A rigorous review of provision has resulted in an overhaul of curriculum planning and teaching, especially in reading and mathematics. You have not been afraid to make significant changes in the school's approach, and have ensured that staff have benefited from quality professional development opportunities. Your strong leadership, and a shared ambition from staff to eradicate second best, has changed completely teaching and learning in Stead Lane Primary.

The whole school team has diligently addressed issues raised at the last inspection. Teachers are keen to learn from each other, and arrangements are made to allow strong teaching to be observed by colleagues. The questioning skills of all adults have also improved, and I observed pupils working independently and sticking at tasks. The work you have completed to develop pupils' understanding of the attributes required to be successful learners is instrumental in supporting their learning. Pupils explained clearly to me which 'learning muscles' they were using in lessons.

From analysis of the data from your tracking systems, observations in lessons and scrutiny of work in pupils' books, it is clear to see significant improvements in the rates of progress made in learning by nearly all pupils. A much larger proportion is working at levels expected for their age and there is also a larger proportion working at a greater depth in learning. You agree that an even greater proportion of pupils could be working at a greater depth of understanding in their learning. You have well-thought-through plans to continue to consolidate pupils' basic skills and reach higher levels of attainment, and have tailored the curriculum accordingly. Similarly, you agree that differences remain in the attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally. It is clear that these differences are diminishing, and there are significant variations between different cohorts. In Year 3, for example, disadvantaged pupils outperform their non-disadvantaged classmates.

Pupils develop excellent citizenship skills and are keen to take on responsibilities through roles such as being a member of the school council, acting as a helping hand for younger pupils or being a chicken ranger. Pupils appreciate the well-ordered and extremely tidy school environment, benefiting from quality displays in classes and shared areas. They are extremely proud of the school and describe it as the best there is.

You have ensured that pupils benefit from a curriculum that captures their interest through visits to important sites across the region linked to their topic work. Older pupils benefit from a residential opportunity, Year 6 eagerly looking forward to three days in Edinburgh. There are many opportunities for pupils to participate in after-school clubs, and you have developed high-quality outdoor learning opportunities for all pupils, the star attraction being the yurt. You agree that the assessment and tracking of subject-specific skills other than in English and mathematics requires further development.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You have ensured that the school's excellent approach to safeguarding and pupils' well-being has been maintained. Under the watchful eye of all staff at school, no stone is left unturned to ensure that all pupils are safe and have opportunities to thrive. The curriculum supports pupils well in maintaining their own safety. Pupils know the dangers of social media and understand they should never post personal details online. Pupils in school report feeling very safe, and have full trust in their teachers and the teaching assistants who look after them. They assured me that any minor disputes are immediately and effectively dealt with by all adults.

Policies, procedures and records are of extremely high quality. Detailed records are maintained, including those for any minor behaviour incidents or extremely rare incidents of poor behaviour. Most pupils are proud to have never received a dreaded blue slip. Staff training is thorough and up to date, including training to ensure that pupils are kept safe from the risk of extremism and online dangers.

Registers of staff training are completed diligently. Staff have access to well-written policies and guidance, and have a secure understanding of their responsibilities for safeguarding pupils.

Inspection findings

- You have ensured that safeguarding is highly effective and the school's work to foster pupils' personal development and welfare is excellent. You have ensured that the school continues to work tirelessly to ensure that all pupils are safe and well cared for. The strong relationships in school, and high levels of trust between adults and pupils, ensure that pupils' conduct in lessons and around school is exemplary. Pupils are polite, caring, considerate and friendly to each other and to visitors. You have invested in developing pupils' knowledge and understanding of personal, social, health and economic issues. Weekly sessions teach pupils important messages through art, music and design technology, and bespoke activities such as the Year 4 enterprise project. This encourages pupils to aspire to great things and to take risks in their learning.
- You acknowledge that over time there have been dips in pupils' progress and achievement in reading and mathematics. You have acted quickly, and in the short space of time as headteacher you have dealt with entrenched weaknesses with gusto. A reorganisation of curriculum planning and strategies in teaching are already having an extremely positive effect on the progress and attainment made by current pupils, and this is clear in work in pupils' books. The vast majority of pupils are now working at the standards the school expects for their age in every year group. Pupils' mathematical fluency and ability to reason are strong. A comprehensive approach to developing pupils' appreciation of a range of texts and ability to infer and retrieve information is established. The pupils who read to me used expression and tried to decode unknown words using their phonics knowledge.
- You agree that, over time, the school has primarily supported the learning and progress of pupils of middle and lower ability. Until recently, leaders had taken their eye off the ball with regard to ensuring stretch and challenge for the most able pupils. During my visit, it was clear to see that since your appointment you have successfully addressed this issue, and now most lessons are skilfully planned to ensure differentiated challenge for pupils of different ability. Evidence in the school's assessment systems and work in pupils' books show that a greater proportion of pupils, in every year group, are now working at a greater depth of understanding in their learning. You recognise that the proportion of pupils working at such a greater depth needs to continue to increase.
- Pupil premium spending is managed effectively to provide targeted support for disadvantaged pupils. This support is regularly evaluated for its impact on pupils' learning and their well-being, and amended or changed as a result. The positive impact of this support is seen through the improving achievement made by current disadvantaged pupils across the school. However, differences still exist in their achievement compared with that of other pupils nationally with the same starting points. You acknowledge that further work is required to raise the attainment of this group of pupils and diminish existing differences.

- Staff and leaders at all levels share the same ambition to eradicate underperformance, working tirelessly to solve problems and make continuous improvements. You acknowledge that one such improvement is to embed systems to assess and track pupils' progress in subject-specific skills. You have ensured that all pupils have equality of opportunity in learning through a consistency of approach to teaching in each year group. Teachers use every opportunity to celebrate pupils' achievements through displaying work in frames around school. Pupils appreciate and respond to the helpful feedback from teachers, and undertake further challenges with relish. Basic skills are developed effectively. Pupils in Year 6 effectively interrogated a piece of text from 'Holes' by Louis Sachar to highlight phrases that pricked their curiosity or allowed them to infer meaning about characters. Year 5 pupils successfully matched equivalent fractions, and proved or disproved rules for changing denominators as part of a reasoning task.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- differences in the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils compared with those of other pupils nationally and their classmates continue to diminish
- the proportion of pupils working at a greater depth of understanding in all subjects continues to increase
- systems to assess and track the progress of pupils in subject-specific skills across the curriculum are embedded.

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, the deputy headteacher and the chair of the governing body. Alongside you, I visited lessons in key stages 1 and 2 and reviewed a small sample of pupils' workbooks. I spoke to pupils about their work and their views of the school, and looked in a number of pupils' workbooks when in lessons. I observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime. A range of documents was considered relating to safeguarding. I examined the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan, the school's monitoring of its own performance, and its assessment and tracking of current pupils' progress and attainment. I also

scrutinised pupils' recent achievement in the 2017 statutory assessments, the 25 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View, and the school's website.