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Mr Kieran Pavey  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Pavey

### **Short inspection of Vane Road Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 14 September 2017, 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 May 2013.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. This is a happy school where pupils work hard and relish the breadth of opportunities provided for them. They told me that they make great friends and value the fact that everyone is kind to one another. Parents are effusive in their praise of your work and that of the staff team. They recognise the improvements that leaders have made to the school since the previous inspection and are thrilled to be part of a school community in which, as one parent stated, 'each child is made to feel valued and important'.

At the previous inspection, leaders were tasked with improving teaching further to raise pupils' attainment and progress, particularly in writing. Over time, pupils' attainment at the end of key stages 1 and 2 has fluctuated. Governors challenged you to address this and your steady and determined work to improve the quality of teaching has resulted in improved outcomes for pupils. In 2017, the proportion of pupils in key stage 1 achieving the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics increased sharply to well above the national average. Similarly, at the end of key stage 2, a higher than average proportion of pupils reached the highest standards of attainment. Across key stages 1 and 2, pupils' achievement in writing is now strong and improving.

I was particularly interested to check on the quality of the teaching of reading.

Historically, pupils' attainment had dipped below the national average in reading across the school. You and your staff team have introduced a range of strategies to improve pupils' reading skills. Your work has been rewarded with improved outcomes for pupils in phonics and reading in key stage 1, where pupils are now achieving above the national average. Similarly, pupils' progress in reading across key stage 2 improved in 2017. You continue to keep this as a school priority and your plans reflect your ongoing commitment to develop a love of reading in all pupils.

The progress made by disadvantaged pupils has been variable in the past. You and your team identified this as a priority and, as a result of your work, differences between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and that of other pupils nationally are diminishing. Across Years 1 and 2, disadvantaged pupils are making rapid progress to catch up quickly where their achievement has previously been low. In 2017, a higher than average proportion of disadvantaged pupils reached the highest standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6. Your school development plan reflects your understanding that there is still some work to do, particularly in early years and for some pupils currently in Years 5 and 6, to ensure that they reach the expected standard for their age.

During this inspection, I looked closely at the progress made by children in early years. In 2017, outcomes for children dipped to below the national average. You know that this needs to be better and that more children need to make faster progress to reach the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of their Reception Year.

As the expectations of the national curriculum and national testing have changed over recent years, leaders have worked hard to ensure that teachers have an appropriate understanding of what pupils must achieve. Improvements to the system of assessment have enabled teachers to address gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. While the progress of every individual pupil is tracked, you currently have several different approaches to collating this information to provide you with a strategic view of pupils' achievement. At times, you recognise that this makes it more difficult for leaders at all levels to evaluate pupils' outcomes quickly and accurately across the school.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders, including governors, have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Several senior staff have received training so that there is always a number of leaders available in school to act on safeguarding issues. Records show that concerns raised by staff are swiftly followed up. Leaders make appropriate contributions to multi-agency meetings to ensure that children are kept safe. The chair of the governing board, as designated safeguarding governor, makes appropriate checks to satisfy himself that the school meets the statutory guidance for keeping pupils safe. Pupils told me that they feel safe, and every parent who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, indicated that they believe their child is safe in school.

A particular strength of the school is the care provided when pupils are vulnerable because of illness or other additional needs. Pupils' records show that staff, led by the

deputy headteacher, are meticulous in making sure that families are well supported. Maintaining pupils' achievement, despite other challenging circumstances, is given top priority. This attention is highly regarded by parents. One parent's comments echoed the views of several: 'We consider ourselves very lucky and thankful that our child attends such a fantastic school that, in our child's "hour of need", pulled out all the stops'.

Over time, pupils' attendance has fluctuated and, in 2016, was below the national average, including for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Since then, you have increased the frequency with which you meet with parents when a pupil's attendance gives cause for concern. Working alongside the attendance officer, you have taken legal action, where you have deemed it appropriate, to address unauthorised absences and term-time holidays. These actions have contributed to a sharp improvement in attendance over the last year to above the national average. In addition, the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has also significantly decreased. You continue to work closely with the few pupils whose attendance needs to improve further.

### **Inspection findings**

- Since the previous inspection, staff have benefited from training to improve the teaching of writing. Pupils' workbooks show that pupils write frequently and at length for a range of different purposes across different subjects. Teachers make meaningful links between subjects so that, for example, pupils in Year 6 practise their writing skills in English lessons using their knowledge of Winston Churchill and the Second World War from their history work. Teachers' better understanding of the demands of the national curriculum has enabled them to improve the accuracy of grammar, punctuation and spelling in pupils' work. Increasingly, pupils use a neat handwriting script and their workbooks in key stages 1 and 2 show that progress in writing is strong.
- You and your leader for English have worked relentlessly to extend the breadth of pupils' reading experiences. Pupils now have access to a more comprehensive range of texts. You recognised, last year, that some pupils needed even more challenging reading material and have introduced the 'top 100' book challenge into Years 5 and 6. Pupils speak excitedly about reading and appreciate these new books. Staff have received training to help them to teach comprehension skills more effectively and this has resulted in improving outcomes for pupils across the school. You know that the more sophisticated skills of inferring and deducing information from a text need to be developed further and have begun to address this through more frequent reading tasks this year.
- In the drive to improve pupils' standards of attainment across the school, you have not lost sight of the importance of a broad, rich curriculum which inspires pupils to do well. Pupils told me how much they value the wide range of visits and excursions,

such as regular trips to the library and trips to historical sites such as the Roman fort Segedunum, to enhance their topic work. Special visitors to the school help to stimulate pupils' interest in their work. Year 2 pupils animatedly recalled a recent visit from 'the Queen' which launched their current topic. This experience ensured that all were able to write convincingly when asked to describe the Queen. Pupils' workbooks show that similar opportunities are a regular feature of the curriculum in all year groups and contribute to pupils' high levels of enthusiasm for learning.

- Middle leaders play an important role in improving the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Governors recognised the need to raise standards in English and mathematics and restructured the leadership to provide enhanced roles to improve these core subjects. Middle leaders have had varied opportunities to develop their subject and leadership expertise. This includes, for example, working alongside the deputy headteacher or with a specialist mathematics teacher from the local 'maths hub'. This has given leaders greater confidence to challenge weaker practice and to support teachers to improve. Pupils' workbooks now show that, as a result of leaders' actions, pupils have more opportunities to develop their problem-solving and reasoning skills in mathematics. Pupils' outcomes have improved in mathematics and more are achieving the higher standards.
- Some children in early years achieve well, particularly in the development of their personal, social and emotional skills. A higher than average proportion exceed the expected standard for their age in some areas of learning. However, too few reach the nationally expected standard for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. In particular, those children with lower starting points, including those who are disadvantaged, do not make rapid enough progress. Leaders recognise that they have not had high enough expectations of what this group of children must achieve and have identified this as a priority for improvement. Children's workbooks show that they receive regular opportunities to work on these important areas of learning. Nevertheless, teaching is not systematic enough to ensure that children master aspects of their learning before they are moved on. Consequently, children do not have a sound enough grasp of their letters and sounds and struggle to form letters and numbers correctly. These gaps in their basic skills impede their chances of achieving well. Highly effective teaching in Year 1 is helping pupils to catch up rapidly. Despite this, leaders recognise that more children must reach the standards expected for their age by the end of Reception Year, so that they have the best chance to succeed in school.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- a higher proportion of children, including those who are disadvantaged, make more rapid progress to reach the early learning goals in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Reception Year
- the attainment of disadvantaged pupils currently in Years 5 and 6 continues to improve so that more reach the expected standard for their age
- the school's approach to gathering assessment information at a strategic level is

refined so that leaders are able to use this information more efficiently to evaluate pupils' achievement.

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

Claire Brown  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this one-day inspection, I met with you and other members of the leadership team. I also met with the chair of the governing board and two other governors. I discussed the school's journey of improvement with a representative of the local authority. I visited classrooms to observe teaching and to look at pupils' work. I observed teaching and learning jointly with you. I spoke to pupils during their lessons and at breaktime and also met with a group of pupils from Years 2, 4 and 6. I reviewed pupils' work in a range of subjects in a sample of their workbooks. You presented information outlining pupils' progress and attainment, the school self-evaluation document, the school development plan and your arrangements for checking the performance of teachers. Documents relating to your work to safeguard pupils, including records of incidents, were checked. I reviewed the information and policies on the school's website. I considered the 50 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) and the four responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.