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Mr Andrew Firth
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Firth

Short inspection of High Spenn Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 31 January 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 March 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You and your leadership team, including governors, have been successful in creating an inclusive school that reflects your personal drive and commitment. This is evident in your work with refugee children and families, your provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and the work you do with other agencies to support vulnerable families.

Since your last inspection, the outcomes for pupils had continued to improve each year until 2016. Many outcomes remain strong but some issues arose with phonics, writing and attendance, especially for disadvantaged boys. Your inclusive ethos means meeting the varied needs of pupils is often complex. In addition, staffing has been destabilised by long-term absences of a number of key staff. You have not allowed these factors to be used as excuses. Instead, building on a strong history of continuous improvement, where issues have arisen you have taken rapid and effective action to address them. In addition, key staff are now returning and staffing has been stabilised.

Pupils, parents and carers are positive about the school. Bullying is rare and pupils feel safe in school. They show consideration towards each other and to adults. Pupils listen well to each other in lessons and reflect on each other's contributions.

Consequently, pupils have positive attitudes to their school life and enjoy their lessons, especially in English. They feel well known and cared for.

Governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school and understand the key priorities for improvement. They are highly committed and understand the day-to-day work of the school. Recent changes have enhanced governors' ability to challenge and support school leaders. Some information provided to governors is not concise enough for them to fully unpick the impact of recent actions in a timely way. School leaders are aware of this and are reviewing how they present this information.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your staff ensure that systems and procedures for safeguarding pupils are in place and kept under review. As a result, good practice is maintained. Record keeping is detailed and of high quality. Staff are focused on ensuring pupil safety in school, online and beyond the school gate. Staff and governors receive relevant training. The curriculum is responsive to emerging issues and pupils are well versed in keeping themselves safe in a variety of contexts. You and your senior leaders continue to work relentlessly with other agencies, as noted in the last inspection, to coordinate the support for vulnerable families.

Inspection findings

- Pupils continue to make strong progress across the school in reading and mathematics. Results show that in 2016, Year 6 pupils achieved outcomes which matched those seen nationally from their various starting points. Disadvantaged pupils also matched the progress made by other pupils nationally in these subjects.
- The 2016 outcomes in writing, however, were poor, especially for disadvantaged pupils. This follows a period of sustained and improving results for pupils and some exceptional outcomes. While turbulence in staffing has had an impact on progress overall, school leaders rightly identified that there was a specific issue with writing provision. They launched a review of the curriculum and put in place a rigorous programme of improvement. Gaps in curriculum provision were identified and addressed. Key groups vulnerable to underachievement such as boys and disadvantaged pupils have been identified and supported. Assessments have been secured through ongoing support from the local authority. Consequently, improved standards of writing are evident in pupils' work. Evidence seen by the inspector confirms the school's view that most disadvantaged pupils have already met age-related expectations in Year 6. All have made at least expected progress and some have made better than expected progress. This pattern is also seen in other key stage 2 classrooms.
- The shortfalls in pupils' understanding and skills in phonics by the end of Year 1, in 2016, have now been addressed. A high turnover of pupils in Year 1 partly explains this dip. Those pupils who did not achieve the required standard have been well supported in Year 2 and the vast majority have already done so. In addition, school leaders have sharpened practice where necessary and focused

on systematic approaches to teaching phonics across early years and key stage 1. The school has used dedicated support to help disadvantaged pupils catch up. Pupils heard reading by the inspector were confident, clear and precise. Those who needed to catch up have already done so.

- Attendance continued to drop last year, especially for disadvantaged pupils. Complex medical issues for a number of pupils explain much of the difference to the previous year. However, relentless action taken to support and challenge families who do not get their children to school often enough has begun to make a difference. Working with, and coordinating with, a range of other agencies to ensure a detailed understanding of the challenges and whereabouts of vulnerable pupils is a key focus for the headteacher. As a result, pupils' overall attendance has now improved and matches that seen nationally. The number of pupils frequently away from school has dropped. However, absences still remain too high for some disadvantaged pupils.
- The Additional Resource Provision (ARP) supports a number of pupils with a hearing impairment. Staff are skilful and work hard to ensure that pupils are integrated into the day-to-day life of the school and are supported well. All pupils make at least expected progress from their various starting points and some make better than expected progress. This is also reflected in the support provided for a number of other pupils with education, health and care plans. The support and development for children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is a strength of the school and reflects its inclusive ethos.
- Assessment systems are secure and accurate. They show where progress in learning is happening and where there are emerging gaps in understanding. This enables teachers to plan learning that meets the current needs of pupils well and, increasingly, to inform the school's priorities for improvement. This results in well-targeted support to help individuals or groups of pupils catch up. This also helps teachers plan learning that pushes the most able pupils. As a result, an increasing proportion meet and now exceed expectations.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- improvements in attendance are maintained and actions to ensure that disadvantaged pupils attend more regularly are intensified
- current rates of progress in writing and phonics are maintained and built on to ensure that all pupils make at least good and often better progress from their various starting points
- information provided to governors is sharpened to provide a more timely account of the current impact of actions being taken by senior leaders.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Brown
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, senior leaders and a group of governors. I spoke with a range of pupils, including a selected group, and listened to some pupils read. I reviewed recent information provided by the school about the progress pupils are making and looked in pupils' books. I evaluated information from Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.

I was particularly interested in seeing how the school addresses the following:

- levels of attendance for disadvantaged pupils
- pupils' progress in writing in key stage 2, particularly disadvantaged pupils
- pupils' progress in phonics in key stage 1
- school leaders' actions to support key groups of pupils
- the effectiveness of safeguarding.

I looked at the information provided on the school's website. I visited several classrooms to observe lessons alongside the headteacher.