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Mr John Dexter
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Dexter

Short inspection of Aycliffe Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 18 May 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 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 are highly ambitious for every pupil at the school. Along with your deputy, you are passionately committed to changing learning behaviours and creating a community in which every child thrives. Your clear focus on understanding why pupils are motivated to learn and how they learn is shared by your highly committed staff team. Your focus on collaboration, with your pupils as partners in learning, and colleagues in your local school group, has ensured that initiatives are appropriate and effective.

This is a school where every pupil's progress and personal development really matter. You and your deputy track pupils' achievement closely. You talk to pupils and teachers to identify learning blocks and act swiftly and appropriately to ensure that appropriate support is put in place. Leaders ensure that teachers correct pupils' misunderstandings as they are learning and this helps them to make rapid progress. Pupils feel valued at school. They know that their ideas and opinions are listened to and acted upon. The regular, and well-attended, pupil panel ensures that pupils have a say in school decision-making. Elected school ambassadors think carefully about improvements, such as changing the talent board to include pupils whose achievements outside of school have not necessarily earned certificates or medals. They explained to me that 'not every talent gets a certificate, and we want to include everyone'.

At the time of your last inspection, the inspector recognised many strengths of the school, including good and improving teaching, support for families and pupils' behaviour. They also identified a need to improve the level of challenge for the most able pupils and to increase the progress of children in Reception. Leaders have addressed these areas effectively. In the 2016 national tests, the proportion of pupils attaining higher levels in English and mathematics at the end of key stage 1 exceeded national levels. In key stage 2, the proportion of pupils attaining higher levels was in line with that seen nationally in writing and mathematics. However, standards were below the national average in reading. The pupil premium grant is used effectively to ensure that the attainment and progress of the most able disadvantaged pupils match those of non-disadvantaged pupils. Children in Reception make good progress from their starting points. Children often start the early years with skills and understanding below those seen typically. In 2016, more children reached a good level of development at the end of their Reception Year than children nationally. Children make good progress because their needs are met and expectations are high.

You, your staff and governors are not complacent, however. Leaders appreciate that pupils' attendance is not as regular as that seen nationally. In addition, you know that, in most classes, expectations of pupils are high and work across the curriculum contains sufficient challenge to ensure that the most able pupils make good progress from their starting points. Leaders are aware of some variability in key stage 2, where this is not always the case, and you are taking appropriate steps to improve teaching still further. You have ensured that effective and regular guided reading sessions develop the skills pupils need to extract meaning from texts and to understand the motivation and complexity of characters.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils' safety is of paramount importance to everyone at the school. Your highly skilled welfare team build good relationships with pupils and their families. This helps to ensure that support needs are known and early help can be provided, which helps to keep pupils safe. The school works effectively with external agencies and partner schools when this is necessary. Pupils feel safe at school and parents who spoke to me were highly satisfied with how the school cares for their children. Parents value opportunities to work with their children in developing a shared understanding of issues such as bullying through making posters together. The importance of e-safety is regularly reinforced by trained pupil e-safety ambassadors who go into classes to talk to other pupils. The library is stocked with specific e-safety books to help reinforce this important message.

Pupils behave well. They are kind to each other and have a good understanding and regard for the school values of caring, tolerance, passion, reflection and innovation.

Staff receive regular and appropriate training about safeguarding. Leaders, including governors, have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Health and safety is regularly monitored by

governors.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we looked closely at specific aspects of the school's provision, including the progress of pupils across key stage 2, the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements, the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, how well children progress in the early years and pupils' attendance.
- Current pupils are making good progress where teaching is good and expectations are high. In mathematics, pupils are developing their reasoning skills effectively, alongside a knowledge of calculation strategies. Small-group sessions, such as before-school mathematics lessons, help to ensure that pupils' understanding of key concepts is secure.
- Expectations of grammar, punctuation and spelling are generally high across the curriculum. In a Year 6 class, a pupil explained that she had chosen to use a semicolon in her writing 'because I am about to give the reader some extra information'. Pupils are given plenty of opportunity to practise their skills through extended writing. They use a wide range of words and their good understanding of grammar to create powerful descriptions. Pupils who read to me did so confidently and fluently. Pupils demonstrated appropriate skills, such as scanning texts to retrieve information, in guided reading sessions.
- Leaders' actions to accelerate progress in English and mathematics have been effective. Staff relish the positive challenge provided by regular pupil progress meetings. Training and support from the local network of schools and the local authority have also helped to develop approaches and structures which focus on effective teaching and learning. In some key stage 2 classes, teaching is not consistently securing the good progress seen in other classes. The deputy headteacher is providing effective support to further raise expectations.
- In the Reception class, the outside area has been developed well. It mirrors and enhances opportunities for learning inside and develops children's independence effectively. During the inspection, children were using the mud kitchen to work happily together to create mud chocolate muffins. Elsewhere, children reinforced their mathematical understanding using a tape measure to 'measure the whole farm'. Structured phonics teaching encourages children to use their knowledge of sounds to attempt to spell words such as 'shelf'. Children whose first language is not English are effectively supported to learn initial sounds, reinforcing their understanding by drawing out the letters in sand trays.
- Levels of attendance are below those of pupils nationally. Leaders are aware of this and have been working with pupils, parents and the local authority to raise attendance levels. Pupils are aware of the importance of regular attendance and are keen for their class to top the weekly attendance charts. There is evidence of initiatives such as 'Project 96', aspiring to 96% attendance, having been effective, but leaders and governors are aware that raising attendance remains a priority for the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the attendance of pupils continues to show a marked and sustained improvement towards being in line with pupils nationally
- teachers' high expectations of pupils seen in some year groups in key stage 2 are consistent across the whole of the key stage, so that progress continues to accelerate.

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

Yours sincerely

Deborah Gordon
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, a group of governors and staff. I met with a representative from the local authority. I toured the school with pupils, observed pupils around the school and in their classes. Together, we visited all classes. I observed teaching and learning, looked at books and spoke to pupils about their work. I also met with pupils to seek their views of the school and listened to them read. Although there were very few responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, I spoke to parents at the school gate and took account of the school's own parent surveys. I considered 14 responses to the staff survey.