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Mrs Anna Young
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Dear Mrs Young

Short inspection of Wessington Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 4 July 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 November 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Parents and carers are very positive about the level of care and support their children receive at Wessington Primary. They are particularly positive about the support for children who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and the wider help that staff give to families with children who are more vulnerable. You work in partnership with a wide range of external agencies to ensure that pupils get the specialist help they need. Some parents were keen to tell me how well their children had settled at the school after experiencing difficulties at other schools. These views reflect leaders' and governors' determination to meet each child's individual needs and, more generally, to combat the negative effects of disadvantage. For example, the carefully planned curriculum includes an array of interesting visits out of school to open minds and broaden opportunities. Some good work on careers, including visits to universities, also helps to raise aspirations and encourage pupils to think about their future.

In the last inspection, you were asked to ensure that lessons progressed briskly, without time being lost. When we visited lessons, we found this to be the case. Learning resources were prepared in advance and teachers had good routines in place to manage the transition between different activities. Teaching assistants knew their role and teachers made sure lessons moved along at a good pace. Pupils applied themselves diligently and were quick to follow instructions. By checking their books, I found that pupils take pride in their work and strive hard to ensure that their handwriting and presentation meet the 'gold standard' you expect. Across the school, I found relationships between teachers and pupils to be relaxed and

friendly. However, we did note that some teaching did not challenge pupils enough to extend their thinking. For example, challenge tasks set in a mathematics lesson were no more difficult than the questions pupils had already completed, and, in a spelling lesson, the teacher simply provided definitions to homophones, when pupils could have checked these for themselves in a dictionary.

The last inspection also asked you to improve the quality of pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar. Teachers have been more attentive to these skills and standards have improved considerably, although pupils do not always remember to use good punctuation in all of their written work.

Children get off to a good start. The governors are strongly committed to helping as many two-year-old children as possible to have access to Nursery so that they can develop the necessary skills to be ready to start school. This strategy is working well, as almost all children who join you as two-year-olds achieve a good level of development by the time they finish their Reception Year. Standards have risen in early years since the last inspection and most children now make good progress. Although they enter Nursery with skills below those typical for their age, an average proportion of children reach the standards expected by the time they enter Year 1. Last year, pupils made average progress in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 1. In key stage 2, their progress was also average in reading and writing. However, pupils made relatively weak progress in mathematics across key stage 2. Since then, you have acted decisively and made several changes which have had a positive effect. Pupils currently in the school are making better progress in mathematics. Your assessment information and the work in pupils' books show that pupils now have a better grasp of mathematical concepts and more secure problem-solving skills.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Thorough checks are made on all adults who work in or visit the school. You review your safeguarding policy regularly and staff training is up to date. A culture of vigilance permeates the school. Governors rigorously check all aspects of safeguarding provision. You ensure that comprehensive records are kept whenever there is a concern about a child's safety. When you need to act to protect a child, you act swiftly and very much in partnership with other agencies such as the police and social services.

Having a full-time family support officer on the staff has strengthened the work you can do to support more vulnerable families. In addition, several members of staff are trained in counselling and provide various forms of therapy that support pupils who have experienced trauma. You also work hard to challenge families with children who do not attend as well as they should. Consequently, the proportion of pupils who miss school regularly has decreased considerably.

Incidents of bullying are rare. This is because much has been done to raise pupils' awareness of it. Pupils told me that they trust members of staff to deal with bullying and that they know how to report any concerns they have.

Inspection findings

- On this inspection, I looked closely at your work to improve pupils' progress in mathematics, as standards of attainment in the subject fell below the national average last year. I found you had looked closely at the reasons why this happened. As part of a wider restructuring of leadership roles, you have appointed a new mathematics subject leader who has made a positive start. You have also provided training for staff so that they better understand the concept of mastery in mathematics. You have also arranged for your teachers to coach one another and reflect upon their practice. Your mathematics curriculum now places more emphasis on reasoning and problem-solving skills. Teachers have a good range of concrete and pictorial resources to support pupils' understanding of arithmetic. Although some teaching still does not challenge pupils enough, the evidence in pupils' books is that many lessons now include thought-provoking and challenging problems. You have also checked the accuracy of your mathematics assessments carefully and used some tests to check that pupils are able to apply their mathematical skills effectively. Your teachers' assessments and the work in pupils' books indicate that a much higher proportion of pupils have a secure grasp of mathematical skills this year.
- I also looked at the quality and breadth of pupils' learning in other subjects. Following the changes to the national curriculum in 2014, the staff thought carefully about the type of curriculum your pupils needed. As a result, they have well-developed schemes of work that integrate the different national curriculum subjects effectively. Topics are interesting and engaging. Each topic is supplemented with visits out of school to places of interest such as Cragside House in Northumberland, the Nissan factory or to regional universities. Topics are studied and revisited in sufficient depth to deepen pupils' understanding and to broaden their experience of the world.
- The quality of pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar has improved. However, pupils take more care in English lessons than when writing in other subjects. My scrutiny of pupils' topic books showed that some pupils made too many careless mistakes. On occasions, pupils' writing lacks meaning because they omit basic punctuation, such as question marks, exclamation marks and full stops.
- This year, you have challenged your staff to improve their practice. Your checks on the quality of teaching had typically shown teaching to be strong, but last November they revealed that standards had slipped. Teachers were not always following policies or meeting expectations. The checks made by governors also raised some concerns. Consequently, you acted quickly by restructuring leadership roles and strengthening the quality and frequency of monitoring. The improvements since then are clear to be seen in pupils' books. Your actions have had a positive effect and have helped to raise standards of attainment. However, you still need to ensure that the detailed information you and other leaders

gather is captured accurately in your self-evaluation summary and that this informs your improvement planning for next year.

- The governors contribute well to the school's strategic direction. They have an excellent knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses because they make well-focused visits to check the impact leaders are having. Their challenge over the last year has proved important, as they have supported you to challenge and remodel the way other leaders were working. These changes have helped to raise expectations and ensure that Wessington Primary continues to be a good school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- information gathered from leaders' monitoring is captured more effectively and used to inform the next round of improvement planning
- teaching is consistently challenging, so that pupils develop a deeper understanding of topics and more go on to attain the higher standard at the end of key stage 2
- pupils maintain good technical writing skills across all subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you, a group of governors, including the chair and the vice-chair of the governing body, a school improvement adviser who supports and challenges the school, and a representative of the local authority. I met with a group of pupils and listened to some of them read. Together, you and I visited lessons in key stages 1 and 2 to look at the quality of teaching and learning. During lesson visits, I scrutinised some pupils' books and talked to pupils about their learning and progress. The subject leader for mathematics and I looked in detail at some pupils' mathematics books and I met with other subject leaders to evaluate the progress pupils are making across a broad range of subjects. I looked at the 12 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and I also considered the 23 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and 35 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, policies, assessment information and monitoring records. I also checked other documents available on the school website. I focused

particularly on the progress of pupils in mathematics, the breadth of the curriculum and the quality of leadership and management. I also looked at the work of governors and the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.