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Mr Alan Scarr
Headteacher
Wheatley Hill Community Primary School
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Dear Mr Scarr

Short inspection of Wheatley Hill Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 2 May 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 February 2014.

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 other leaders are committed to the school being at the heart of the local community and providing the best possible education and experiences for pupils. You and other leaders lead the school with determination and passion for all pupils to achieve well, to thrive and be their very best. As a result, pupils are cared for and supported extremely well. There is a tangible, inclusive community spirit throughout the school and a strong sense of pride and belonging from staff, governors, pupils and parents and carers.

You and other leaders have forged excellent, constructive working relationships. Governors are active in the life of the school. They are passionate about the children and the community and genuinely care for the community they serve. This enables you, other leaders and governors to act swiftly and address any areas of concern.

Since the previous inspection, you have effectively addressed the identified areas for improvement. Pupils' achievement in writing, for example, has improved across the school, including in the early years. Pupils now write for a wide range of purposes and audiences regularly. For the last two years, pupils' progress in writing in key stage 2 has been in the top 20% of schools nationally. Middle leadership has also strengthened. Middle leaders are now clear about their roles and responsibilities and are a strong and effective team. They play a central part in the school's development and journey of improvement.

Your evaluation of the school's strengths and areas that currently need further

attention is precise and accurate. Staff have benefited from training to develop their skills. As a result, teaching across the school meets the needs of pupils increasingly well. Teaching is characterised throughout the school by positive relationships, a 'can do' attitude and high expectations. Well-deployed support staff work with pupils effectively, particularly those pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, to ensure that they have every opportunity to progress at the same rate as their peers. Pupils who access the school's specialist provision are well cared for and catered for in terms of improving pupils' academic skills and social and emotional well-being.

You are, rightly, proud of the innovative curriculum that is being developed to provide rich and stimulating learning experiences for pupils. The use of continuous provision across all year groups is benefiting pupils as they develop skills such as resilience, cooperation and reasoning. Pupils appreciate the many opportunities they are given to enhance their personal and social skills, especially learning outdoors.

Although by the end of Years 2 and 6, standards of attainment are lower than average, pupils make good progress from, often, low starting points. In Year 6 in 2017, for example, pupils' progress through key stage 2 was well above average in reading and writing and above average in mathematics. Pupils currently in key stage 2 are also achieving well. Standards across the school are generally rising. However, you are well aware that too few pupils are reaching the higher levels of attainment by the end of key stages 1 and 2. Work to address this is already under way, but more is still to be done, especially to ensure that pupils are consistently challenged in their work.

Safeguarding is effective.

The care and support that pupils receive is excellent. You and other key staff know the pupils and their families well. Safeguarding is given a high priority in the day-to-day work of the school. Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and records are meticulously kept and maintained. The single central record is carefully checked and monitored by key staff, such as governors, and recruitment and suitability checks to work with children are carried out conscientiously.

All staff have received thorough training that is updated regularly. As a result, they make use of this so that pupils are safe, and any worries or concerns are reported and dealt with promptly.

Pupils are happy, work productively and take pride in their work and their school. Pupils are exceptionally well behaved and polite. They participate in their learning confidently and cooperatively and show high levels of engagement in class. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, at an age-appropriate level, and they are confident that staff quickly and effectively help them if they are worried about anything.

The school is a calm and purposeful place. Classrooms are interesting, stimulating and vibrant environments so that pupils can thrive.

Inspection findings

- The first area that I focused on during the inspection was the impact of leadership and teaching on improving standards of attainment by the end of key stage 1, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. Inspection evidence shows that teaching in key stage 1 is strong and effective. Current pupils are achieving well, and attainment is steadily improving. You and other leaders carefully monitor pupils' progress. This allows teaching and additional support to be tailored to pupils' individual needs and abilities and to provide them with every opportunity to improve their knowledge, skills and understanding. Pupils' individual needs are a priority for staff. Effective deployment of support and resources ensures that pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are given good opportunities to catch up where it is needed. Pupils use their phonic skills increasingly effectively to blend sounds and develop fluency in decoding words that are more difficult.
- Secondly, I focused on how well pupils across the school are challenged in their learning. This is because, in recent years, the proportion of pupils reaching the higher standards of attainment by the end of Years 2 and 6 in reading, writing and mathematics, overall, has been below average. Current school assessment information and work in pupils' books indicate that there are signs of improvement. However, pupils' work sometimes lacks challenge, particularly for the most able pupils. Making sure that pupils are consistently challenged is an important next step.
- Thirdly, I looked at the effectiveness of early years provision. This is because, for the past three years, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development, although rising, has remained below average. From often lower than typical starting points, children make good progress. The indoor and outdoor learning spaces in early years are vibrant and stimulating. Children are provided with well-organised and productive opportunities to develop their understanding and skills, particularly their fine-motor skills, speech, language and communication. Children are well engaged in their learning, and the environment is calm and purposeful. High expectations and aspirations for all are established at a young age. For example, a group of children worked well with their teacher to explore what they wanted to be when they are older.
- Leaders ensure that additional funding is used to provide effective support for disadvantaged children. Speech and language support, for example, successfully increases confidence of children in need of extra support in this area.
- You and other leaders, candidly, spoke about and presented evidence to demonstrate how your work to accelerate children's skills in the early years is playing a key role in improving outcomes by the end of the early years and then into key stage 1. Leaders acknowledge that this important work needs to continue so that those children with lower starting points catch up and are ready for learning in key stage 1.
- The final area that I focused on was how you and other leaders are improving attendance. This was because, in 2017, attendance dipped to below average. The proportion of pupils who were regularly absent increased markedly, and was

much higher than average. You and other leaders recognise that there is an increasing number of pupils and families in need of additional support to ensure that pupils attend school regularly. Individual pupils' attendance is checked and tracked carefully, and so you have an insightful knowledge and understanding of which pupils and families require support.

- The key member of staff with responsibility for checking attendance has strengthened this area of the school's work. She has forged strong links with the vast majority of parents and acts quickly when attendance is a concern. As a result, attendance is showing some signs of improvement. However, too many pupils are still absent too often, especially disadvantaged pupils. You and other leaders, including governors, acknowledge that continuing to work with parents to encourage them to ensure that their child attends regularly remains an important next step.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of the early years continues to improve so that children are ready for learning in Year 1
- teachers provide work that is consistently challenging so that the proportion of pupils that reach greater depth by the end of key stages 1 and 2 increases
- staff continue to work with parents to ensure that their children attend school regularly.

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

Darren Stewart
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and other leaders, including governors, to evaluate the impact of your work since the previous inspection. During these meetings, we also discussed the actions taken to improve the quality of pupils' writing and middle leadership since the previous inspection. Together, we visited all classes in each phase of the school, but particularly early years and key stage 1, to evaluate the improvements asserted in current children's and pupils' assessment information. I discussed with you current pupils' assessment information and I reviewed a wide range of work in pupils' books, particularly concentrating on disadvantaged pupils and children's achievements in writing throughout the early

years. I spoke to pupils, both formally and informally, about their learning and experiences of school. I listened to a group of pupils read. I read and scrutinised a wide range of school documentation, including the school self-evaluation document, the school's development plan and pupil premium strategy plan. I also scrutinised attendance information and documents relating to behaviour, safeguarding and child protection.

There were no responses to Ofsted's staff survey, and no pupils completed the survey. However, I took into account the 35 responses to Parent View.