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Mrs Julie Parnaby
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Dear Mrs Parnaby

Short inspection of Simonside Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 June 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 March 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your recent appointment, you have ensured that the existing strengths in leadership across the school have been consolidated and enhanced. Your approachability and openness with staff have made the change in headship seamless. As a result, the quality of education for pupils in Simonside has not been compromised in any way. You have benefited greatly from the skilled and experienced work of the deputy headteacher. Together, you form a strong and determined team, driven by the desire to secure additional improvements and further enhance teaching and learning.

Senior leaders are honest and frank about the school's strengths and areas to improve. Your accurate and robust self-evaluation forms the basis for detailed plans to make further improvements. You agree that, if planned actions are broken into measurable steps and linked to existing monitoring activities, it would enable governors to hold leaders to account more rigorously. You and other leaders have provided a steady hand in guiding the school through a period of significant change in staffing. There is a perceptible sense of teamwork among teaching staff, underpinned by a keen enthusiasm to provide the very best experiences for pupils. The role played by the governing body is becoming increasingly important in setting the strategic direction of the school.

There is a continuing drive to ensure that all pupils reach their full potential by making the maximum possible progress from their starting points. Over time, pupils have achieved well, reaching levels of attainment which match those found nationally at the end of Year 6. The rates of progress that pupils make in their

learning have also been above those found nationally, including for disadvantaged pupils. In published data, the proportion of pupils working at a greater depth of learning has been just below that found nationally. You acknowledge that this area remains a key priority for the school. The level of challenge provided by teachers for pupils, especially for the most able pupils, is variable across the school. As a result, the proportion of pupils who are working at a greater depth in their learning is not as high as it could be. The whole school team is working hard to raise expectations of what all pupils can achieve and establish a culture in which pupils can excel. The school's work to introduce a new approach to teaching creative and foundation subjects across the curriculum has been a key part of ensuring that pupils have opportunities to tackle open-ended problems and conduct their own research. Staff are currently working hard to ensure that the pitch of work provided for pupils is closely aligned to their ability.

You are continuing to address the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. As a result of consistently good teaching, the achievement of pupils has continued to improve, especially in key stage 1. Work seen during the inspection demonstrated the numerous opportunities pupils now have to investigate and solve problems in mathematics. Pupils have daily opportunities to practise and improve their handwriting, and many are able to write neatly and legibly, including children in the early years. Pupils are clear about how well they have done in their work and what they need to do to improve.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All staff are vigilant and quick to raise any issue or concern. The thorough approach of the school business manager ensures that records and documents are of high quality. An extensive and detailed online system ensures that absolutely nothing is missed that could compromise pupils' safety and well-being. Detailed chronologies of incidents and concerns enable leaders to scrutinise in detail all aspects of pupil welfare. Work completed by the learning mentors is having a significantly positive impact on pupils' well-being and attendance.

Access to well-written policies and guidance ensures that all adults have a secure understanding of their responsibilities for safeguarding pupils. Staff and governor safeguarding training is up to date, including training to ensure that recruitment procedures are watertight. The school is working hard to ensure that any staff who miss key training are provided with other opportunities to access training. The curriculum supports pupils well in maintaining their own safety. Pupils have full trust in their teachers and teaching assistants who look after them and reported feeling safe all of the time. They maintained that behaviour in school is good and improving.

Inspection findings

- You have worked hard to ensure that all pupils make strong and sustained progress in their learning, including disadvantaged pupils. Evidence seen during the inspection clearly shows that in most year groups and in all subjects the

progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils matches or outstrips that of their non-disadvantaged classmates. You are aware of cohort-specific variations which remain and the underlying reasons for these variations. Work is under way to address these issues. You acknowledge that raising the achievement of the most able pupils is a key priority in school improvement plans. The school's tracking data held on newly introduced systems shows that the proportion of pupils working at a greater depth in their learning is beginning to increase in most year groups in school, but not all.

- There is a tangible commitment to the all-round development and well-being of every single pupil, enabling them to flourish academically and socially. Ensuring pupils' safety and personal development continues to be one of the school's highest priorities. One of the first actions you undertook on taking up your post in January was a thorough audit of the school's safeguarding systems. Policies and procedures are continuously reviewed and updated, annual staff refresher training completed and systems to report and record any concerns reviewed and enhanced. The whole staff team has recently completed training to prevent radicalisation.
- All staff contribute by reporting even the smallest concern regarding a child's well-being, providing an accurate history and a chronology of events held in the rigorous online system. This system includes behaviour logs which are then cross-referenced to any other reported concerns. The sterling work undertaken by the caring and determined learning mentors provides very effective support for vulnerable pupils and their families. This includes addressing any instances of low attendance and providing access to support from a range of other agencies.
- Despite changes in the teaching staff and the recent change of headteacher, there remains a strong team spirit and dedicated work ethic among most staff. Senior leaders and subject leaders speak passionately about supporting one another and maintaining high levels of trust. This collegiate approach and buoyant staff morale have enabled teachers to share ideas, seek advice and share successes and lessons which did not work quite as well. Without this openness and shared ambition to excel, it would have been impossible to successfully implement the new approach to the curriculum.
- Leaders at all levels, including the governing body, are fully involved in devising and implementing school improvement plans. The role of subject and middle leaders has been instrumental in the improvements seen in teaching and learning since the previous inspection. Subject leaders devise action plans for their own subjects, and are becoming increasingly adept at monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. Systems to assess and track pupils' progress in subject-specific skills are thorough, robust and embedded. You have worked hard to introduce and continually improve a unique and exciting method of teaching creative and foundation subjects. Termly topics are devised and created to capture pupils' interests and imagination, and cover every objective from each national curriculum subject. Each topic begins with an open-ended question that cannot be answered using online search engines, such as 'Can one person save the world?' or 'Is medicine always marvellous?' Following a launch day to hook pupils' interests, classrooms are turned into magical places linked to the topic studied. Topics are supplemented by a range of visits out of school to places of

local importance and by 'experts' to support pupils' learning. Pupils benefit from many opportunities to develop their reading, writing and mathematical skills. For example, in Year 3, pupils used similes and metaphors in writing a haiku poem from Jane Seymour to Henry VIII. This new approach is quickly raising pupils' aspirations, broadening their experiences and providing them with a meaningful context and purpose for their schoolwork. It is part of the reason for pupils' generally very positive attitudes to school and their learning.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- levels of challenge in work set for the most able pupils continually stretch their thinking and understanding so that an increased proportion are working at a greater depth in their learning
- school improvement planning is further sharpened to ensure that planned actions are broken into measurable steps and linked closely to the school's calendar of monitoring activities.

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

Yours sincerely

Phil Scott
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher and members of the senior leadership team. I also met with other subject leaders, the school business manager and both learning mentors. I held a meeting with two governors including the chair of the governing body. Alongside you, I visited lessons in each key stage and reviewed a sample of pupils' workbooks in lessons. I spoke to pupils about their work and their views of the school. I observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime. A range of documents was considered relating to safeguarding. I examined the school improvement plan, the school's monitoring of its own performance and its assessment and tracking of current pupils' progress and attainment. I scrutinised pupils' achievement in the 2016 and 2017 statutory assessments. I also reviewed the 34 responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, and the 21 responses to the staff questionnaire. I also scrutinised the school's website.