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Mr Robin Nodding
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Nodding

Short inspection of Copeland Road Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 February 2019, 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 January 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Supported by the deputy headteacher and governors, you have continued to make the school a welcoming, friendly and nurturing environment. Since the previous inspection, you have successfully recruited teachers into four teaching posts to further strengthen the quality of education provided at the school. Also since the previous inspection, a new chair of the governing body is in post.

After the previous inspection, you were asked to strengthen the level of challenge in the tasks teachers set for pupils. You have taken effective action so that, most of the time, work is pitched at the right level. You were also asked to strengthen your systems for checking how pupils of different abilities are getting on. You have taken steps to address this area for improvement to good effect.

Your leadership, together with that of governors, is determined, reflective and effective. You do not sit back and take for granted any successes. Rather, you continually ask, 'How can we make this better?' In particular, you have taken two major leadership decisions recently. These decisions are already having a substantial effect in improving pupils' skills.

Firstly, you decided that you wanted to further improve standards of reading across the school, but especially in Reception and Year 1. Reading was already high on your agenda, but you wanted to make sure that the foundations of all pupils' ability to read would be laid securely at this early stage. To achieve this, you have

implemented a high-quality phonics programme. Crucially, you have invested time and funding into training teachers and teaching assistants in the correct method to teach this particular programme. Consequently, there is a common understanding between those who teach the programme so that pupils get the same approach consistently, regardless of who is teaching them.

As a result of the common approach to phonics teaching, pupils are making good progress in developing their early reading skills. You closely check how well pupils are progressing through the phases of the phonics scheme. This checking is effective in spotting at an early stage when pupils are beginning to struggle and are at risk of falling behind. The common, consistent method of phonics teaching means that pupils are given effective extra help, whoever is teaching them.

The second major decision you took recently was to overhaul the way in which writing is taught at Copeland Road. You realised that while aspects of pupils' writing were successful, some could be improved further. You have introduced a new scheme of work with the intention of widening the styles and purposes of writing pupils are required to learn. At the same time, it is your intention that pupils' vocabulary and grammatical skills will broaden. While there is still variability in teachers' expectations of what pupils in upper key stage 2 can achieve, there are encouraging signs that pupils' opportunities to write effectively in a wider range of genres are, indeed, growing.

As part of your decision to change the way you approach the teaching of writing, you have made a substantial change to how you approach the teaching of handwriting. This is because you recognised that this is an area of pupils' skills which could be further improved. You introduced a new, school-wide handwriting scheme at the end of the summer term in 2018. This is beginning to have a positive effect, especially in key stage 1. To be fully effective, more quickly, it now needs another intensive push.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your leadership team have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The checks on adults who work at the school, or visit, are thorough and meet legal requirements. You make sure that all staff are trained to recognise the signs of abuse, with regular updates to this training.

As a result of the strong safeguarding culture that you have established and maintained, pupils told me that they feel safe at school. Pupils described a tolerant and welcoming school community. They said that 'there are always lots of adults around' and that they would tell one of them if worried about anything. Pupils are especially reassured by the presence of your 'anti-bullying ambassadors' and Year 6 'buddies', who pupils feel able to talk to if anything is bothering them. Indeed, the pupils who spoke to me were all in agreement that bullying is not an issue at school. This view is endorsed by most of the responses to Ofsted's surveys for parents, pupils and staff. Of the few responses, a very small number are less convinced by the school's management of bullying. However, you are far from

complacent in this matter and have strong systems in place to take appropriate action when it is required.

Inspection findings

- The meticulous and systematic teaching of phonics has been crucial to the improving standards of reading in Reception and key stage 1. Based on their training, teachers and teaching assistants deliver tightly planned phonics lessons. Reception children and pupils in Years 1 and 2 are engaged in learning new sounds as a result of teachers' planning and the consistent method of delivery. The effect of this focused approach is that in 2018 the proportion of pupils who met the expected standard in phonics at the end of Year 1 was above the national average.
- Pupils use the phonics strategies they have been taught to read unfamiliar words, including those with irregular spelling patterns. Due to leaders' effective systems for assessing pupils' reading ability, teachers are well-placed to judge the correct level of book for pupils to move on to when ready. Consequently, books are suitably matched to pupils' phonics abilities and help to stretch pupils' reading skills further.
- Currently, the school is in a transitional period as it introduces a school-wide bank of books which are consistent with the chosen phonics scheme. Leaders have been careful to ensure that when pupils move on to a new book, even if it is from a different phonics scheme, the sounds and 'blends' of letters are the right ones for pupils' phonics ability. This, too, supports the good progress pupils are making with their reading.
- Pupils are enthusiastic readers. They were keen to read to me and proud of their reading skills. Pupils' reading records show extensive lists of books which have been taken home and read, with frequent parental signatures indicating the positive support from home. Leaders' information indicates that the school library is increasingly busy and that pupils are able to request particular books to be purchased. Leaders' actions to improve writing have also benefited key stage 2 pupils' reading. As part of the writing focus on 'real texts' (extracts from class reading books), pupils are increasingly exposed to more-challenging language, grammar and ideas in their reading.
- To further strengthen pupils' writing, leaders have introduced new schemes of work to widen the range of writing opportunities. As a result, pupils now write in a wider range of genres, producing a broader selection of compositions. There is still an over-representation of story-based writing, but leaders' schemes have ensured that other genres are beginning to feature more widely, such as newspaper reports, instructional writing and summaries.
- Pupils' writing from Reception, to key stage 1 and on to key stage 2 shows a progression of skills. Children in Reception are taught the basics of writing, including sitting correctly at a table, with pencils gripped comfortably and correctly. This is enabling most children to make effective progress in their handwriting and to lay the foundations for key stage 1 well.

- It is clear that as pupils move on from Reception, they are acquiring the skills to use a wider range of punctuation, tenses, clause types and vocabulary for effect. At times, however, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are inconsistent, with learning objectives for older and most-able pupils occasionally based around using simple language features such as adjectives. Pupils in Years 3 and 4, where the new scheme has had more time to take effect, are writing with greater ambition and flair, at times, than pupils in Year 6. Leaders are aware of this, however, and it is a priority for further action.
- Leaders recognised that handwriting was an area for attention and have acted to address this. A new handwriting scheme has been introduced recently, with the effect that younger pupils' neatness and presentation is improving. It is a little less evident in Year 6, where there are well-set habits to overcome. The journey to a school-wide high standard of handwriting has begun: it now requires a second wave of focus to generate the step-change which leaders desire.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they further build on the recent advances in the quality of pupils' writing, so that a wider range of vocabulary, punctuation and composition across the curriculum and years is fully embedded, particularly for the most able pupils and those in upper key stage 2
- they continue to implement the recently introduced handwriting scheme, with a renewed school-wide push.

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

Steve Shaw
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met several times with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. I also met: members of the governing body, including the chair; teachers of Reception, Year 1 and Year 2; and a representative of the local authority. I spoke with several parents as they dropped off their children at the start of the day.

I met a group of pupils from Years 4, 5 and 6. I listened to children from Reception read, as well as pupils from Years 1, 2 and 3. I looked at a sample of pupils' English and writing books drawn from Years 1 to 6.

Accompanied by the headteacher and deputy headteacher, I visited all classes of the school, with a particular focus on phonics lessons in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2. During these lesson visits, I spoke with pupils about what they were learning and looked in their books.

I considered a wide range of school documentation, including: leaders' self-evaluation and plans for improvement; information about Reception children's and key stages 1 and 2 pupils' progress, especially their reading; records relating to safeguarding and the checks carried out on adults who work in, or visit, the school; records of bullying incidents and leaders' actions; and numerous policies published on the school website.

I took into account the 10 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Parent View, along with 11 free-text responses from parents. I also considered the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaires for staff (20 responses) and pupils (16 responses).