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Mrs Johanna James
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs James

Short inspection of Lobley Hill Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 4 July 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 May 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Despite significant changes in leadership and a subsequent period of instability, you have, since your appointment in 2016, developed a strong and cohesive team of leaders. As a result, you have been able to bring about clear improvements in the quality of education and your actions are leading to focused developments. Your sharp and insightful analysis of the school's strengths and weaknesses has led to effective action to address areas of concern. Leaders make good use of external views and support in order to confirm evaluations and aid improvements. As a result, the school continues to go from strength to strength.

Lobley Hill Primary School is a lively, cohesive community. There is a tangible team spirit. Leaders and governors work collaboratively to help staff and pupils to, as your mission statement states, 'be the best we can be'. Leaders have established an effective partnership between home and school. Pupils are happy and are keen to share your core values, being 'curious, adventurous and respectful in order to achieve personal excellence'.

Parents and carers highly value the contact that they have with your staff. The vast majority of parents I spoke with during the inspection, and those who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were very positive about the school. Comments included: 'A fantastic school community. I couldn't wish for a better school for my children to attend. A great curriculum with lots of opportunities both in school and in the wider community.' Another parent said, 'This school is excellent.'

The headteacher, teachers and teaching assistants are all friendly and take an interest in children. If you have any questions staff will always make time to talk to you.' A third parent summed up the views of many, saying, 'I would recommend this school to any parent.'

Leaders ensure that governors receive accurate and detailed information. As a result, governors are well informed and have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Governors are not complacent. Through regular meetings with you and other leaders, they test the veracity of the reports you make. They make good use of support from the local authority adviser in order to ensure that they are fully informed. Governors have a range of skills and are highly committed to the school. Consequently, they offer you an appropriate balance of challenge and support.

At the last inspection, leaders were asked to raise standards and rates of pupils' progress, especially in mathematics. Leaders have refocused the way in which mathematics is taught across the school. Following a local authority review and training from a specialist adviser, the teaching of mathematics has improved. Leaders have rightly identified gaps in pupils' basic numerical and mathematical skills that are hindering pupils' mathematical fluency and the application of their skills. The introduction of focused sessions such as 'Lobley Ten', a 10-minute numeracy intervention, is aimed at addressing this issue. Despite this, published outcomes and inspection evidence show that currently these gaps remain. Consequently, pupils' basic skills in mathematics are not secure.

Pupils are well behaved and enthusiastic learners. They concentrate well in lessons and work hard. Pupils are courteous, well mannered and friendly. There is an evident rapport between teachers and pupils, which gives the pupils confidence in asking and answering questions. They make the most of the opportunities available to them. They work well together. The vast majority of pupils enjoy coming to school. You are clear with parents and pupils about the importance of good attendance. You celebrate this with pupils and have recently begun to work more closely with parents to ensure that pupils attend school regularly. The workshops you have recently introduced for parents to support them in helping their children at school is an example of this work. However, too many pupils are frequently absent from school.

Safeguarding is effective.

The culture of safeguarding in the school is strong. Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are in place and are fit for purpose. As designated safeguarding leader, you work collaboratively with other leaders to ensure that the school's systems for gathering safeguarding information are responsive to the changing needs of pupils and their families. Staff provide you with detailed information that helps you form a comprehensive picture of the support vulnerable pupils may need. Consequently, you readily identify and provide help to pupils and families as appropriate. Your records are well organised and demonstrate your tenacity in ensuring that support is in place for the most vulnerable.

You ensure that your staff receive regular, high-quality training. Staff are, therefore, vigilant and have a clear understanding of their role in keeping children safe from harm.

Pupils feel safe and say that they are well cared for by all adults in the school. They also say that they help each other to stay safe. Pupils know what bullying is and feel that it is not common at Lobley Hill Primary School. They know that people can fall out and be unkind but are very confident in the support available to them when this happens. Pupils are aware of how to stay safe in a variety of situations, such as when working on the internet.

Inspection findings

- When we visited the Nursery, the children were completely engaged as they involved themselves in the various adult-led activities. Leaders ensure that the different tasks are aimed at developing a range of skills. In making pasta necklaces, the children were clearly developing their fine motor skills but also being encouraged to count. Another group of children were mesmerised by the butterflies as they learned about the story of the hungry caterpillar. Staff take every opportunity to engage children in conversation and to extend their vocabulary. They actively support children's social development, encouraging them to share and take turns.
- In the Reception class we visited, the children were engaged in a variety of different tasks. They were able to use the labels provided to identify and talk about their learning. Some were talking about being a designer, others an explorer and others a mathematician. There was evident rapport between the adults and the children and a focus on encouraging the children to talk using a variety of different new words. When we returned to the Reception class in the afternoon, they were exploring in your 'Forest School'. Once again, there were high levels of engagement and the children were exploring and telling me about the den that they were building or the game that they were playing. Despite these evident strengths in the early years, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of their Reception Year has been variable since the last inspection, and in 2018 was below the national average.
- Strong teaching of phonics in the early years means that typically children make a good start in developing their literacy skills. The Year 1 phonics intervention sessions that we visited were characterised by high levels of engagement and focus. Pupils are captivated by the creative approach to these sessions. The variety of games and tasks captures the pupils' interest. As a result, they embrace the challenge and show off their phonic knowledge with great confidence. Despite this, the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard in phonics in 2018 was below the national average. However, leaders know the pupils well and current pupils are making strong progress along their journey to becoming confident early readers and writers.
- The mathematics lessons that we visited confirmed your view that teachers have high expectations for learning and are beginning to develop pupils' use of

mathematical language more confidently and consistently. Teachers use effective questioning to encourage pupils to think and explain their understanding. Pupils are confident about asking questions and explaining their thinking. They enjoy, and talk positively about, their mathematics lessons. Work in books shows that teachers set a range of challenging and interesting tasks to develop their fluency, reasoning and problem solving. However, due to significant gaps in prior learning, pupils demonstrate that they have not yet developed a secure understanding of basic numerical and mathematical skills to be able to apply these consistently well.

- There was a real buzz of excitement in the Year 3 and Year 4 science lessons that we visited. The Year 3 pupils were keenly identifying the scientific names for the various parts of the body and accurately labelling the skeleton outlines they had drawn. Meanwhile, the Year 4 pupils were using scientific terms to discuss food chains. The pupils were able to explain in detail the meanings of 'producer', 'primary consumer', 'secondary consumer' and 'tertiary consumer'. They were rightly proud of their work and keen to show me that their science work was linked to their understanding of healthy lifestyles. One pupil remarked, 'You should have been here last week when we did an experiment – it was amazing!' It is little surprise, therefore, that pupils show that they have a sound understanding of the key concepts they are covering, and that science is a subject that they very much enjoy.
- Teachers make effective use of the generous outside space available. Year 5 pupils were keen to show me the Mexican art that they were producing from natural materials. They were able to clearly explain their work and how this was part of their topic on Día de Muertos or Day of the Dead. Pupils worked effectively in pairs or small groups, demonstrating high levels of focused cooperation.
- Pupils enjoy an interesting and well-balanced curriculum, which is enriched through trips and clubs that broaden pupils' outlook and promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural education well. Pupils discussed the different opportunities they have with enthusiasm. Year 6 pupils are very proud to take on additional responsibilities. Around the school, these pupils wear their 'Buddy Hoodie' or 'Sports-Crew Hoodie' with a great sense of pride. You make sure that all Year 6 pupils have the chance to take on a role of responsibility, including promoting attendance as 'attendance leaders' or as 'prefects' or 'digital leaders'. For those Year 6 pupils who do not wish to take on a formal role, they are encouraged to act as Year 6 role models, to ensure that everyone is involved. Across the school, younger pupils can be members of the 'eco-squad', ensuring that the school is focused on the environment. However, one of the most sought-after roles is that of 'Burrow Leader', those assigned to looking after the school rabbits. Through such roles, you develop pupils' resilience, confidence and awareness of others, ensuring that they are well prepared for the challenges of secondary school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- basic skills in mathematics are secure so that pupils develop greater fluency and confidence in the application of their skills
- they continue to challenge and support parents of pupils who do not attend school regularly
- they continue to embed the improvements in the early years so that a greater proportion of children achieve a good level of development at the end of their Reception Year.

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

Yours sincerely

Daniel Murray
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteachers and a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body. I also met with your early years leader, your special educational needs coordinator and your leaders of English and mathematics. Together, you and I visited classrooms to observe teaching and to look at pupils' work. I also looked in depth at pupils' writing and mathematics books and other work. I met with a group of pupils. I listened to eight pupils read. I also listened informally to pupils read during my visits to lessons. I observed one of your teaching assistants leading a phonics intervention session with two pupils. I took account of 33 free-text responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 28 questionnaire responses from staff. There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire. I spoke to parents at the start of the school day. I also evaluated recent information in relation to pupils' progress throughout the school, the school's self-evaluation document and the school improvement plan. I met with you as designated safeguarding leader and reviewed documentation and records about how you keep your pupils safe.