

17 July 2019

Mrs Rebecca Pavey
Executive Headteacher
Mount Pleasant Primary School
Newton Lane
Darlington
County Durham
DL3 9HE

Dear Mrs Pavey

Short inspection of Mount Pleasant Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 2 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in July 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

You and your team have sustained strong rates of progress and accelerated improvements in many aspects of the school's work since the previous inspection. Your staff share a commitment to achieving the highest standards of care and progress for all pupils. With your head of school, you have strengthened leadership capacity at all levels. Many of your leaders are recognised for their expertise, which they share with other schools in the trust. This strong leadership, supported by high standards of teaching, has enabled pupils to make extremely strong progress and achieve higher standards of attainment.

You have a commitment to continuing improvement by ensuring there is no 'wasted time.' You show a determination to achieve high standards in all classes, not simply those where pupils undergo statutory assessments. All staff show a commitment to removing any barriers to pupils' learning. Specific interventions, often delivered by highly effective teaching assistants, support pupils' social and emotional development and address their literacy and numeracy needs. The school may have a much-higher-than-average proportion of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), but this does not limit pupils'

ambition or their achievements. Indeed, in 2018, the proportion of pupils achieving expected and higher standards of attainment at the end of key stage 2 was above that seen nationally.

The ethos of high expectation is underpinned by strong leadership systems to check pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. You have established clear improvement priorities and shown a good track record in addressing these successfully. Your team checks pupils' progress at regular intervals and works with teachers to address any underachievement. Subject leaders in English and mathematics, along with the early years leader and the special educational needs coordinator, have the necessary expertise to check standards and support curriculum development. They support improving practice at Mount Pleasant and at other schools in the trust, providing convincing capacity for further improvement.

An important component in your recent success is the close relationships you are building with parents and carers. Parents are welcomed to the school through weekly class breakfasts, rewards assemblies and 'stay and play' sessions in the early years. In addition, specific support is provided to parents through your home-school mentors, who provide valuable links with other agencies or simply an opportunity to discuss concerns. These strengthening relationships have helped in improving behaviour and attendance and encouraging higher aspirations among your community. One parent praised the 'amazing support staff, teachers and senior leadership team' and another wrote that her child had 'a real love of learning that the teachers help to inspire. There is always a warm and welcoming feel about the school from the teachers and pupils alike'.

The strongest advocates for the improvements you have made are the pupils themselves. They are happy and confident learners, who display a pride in their school community. They value the care and support they receive and the exciting opportunities to learn across a range of subjects. Pupils demonstrate excellent attitudes to learning and follow the simple but clear school aim of caring for themselves, others and their school. These attitudes do not simply evolve by themselves. They are cultivated through the collective actions of all staff and your wider school community.

Your local governing body provides effective support and challenge. Governors appreciate the scale of improvement that you and your team have achieved since the previous inspection. They know the school well and have focused areas of responsibility that help them to check the school's work. You provide governors with regular updates on pupils' progress, but they also validate this through an external consultant, who provides objective scrutiny. The trust has developed effective systems of support and accountability that have supported the school's improvement journey.

Safeguarding is effective

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Your team is committed to the safety and welfare of pupils. It has

established close links with families and provides early help to support children. Your team is particularly mindful of the needs of vulnerable pupils. You carry out regular audits of safeguarding practice to check that policies and practice are up to date. Leaders make thorough checks on the suitability of adults working at the school. School leaders and members of staff undergo extensive training to enable them to carry out their safeguarding responsibilities. Leaders follow through any concerns they may have over pupils' welfare and record these concerns thoroughly.

Pupils spoken with say that they feel safe in the school, and the parents who responded to questionnaires agree. Pupils say that bullying is extremely rare and that staff are highly effective in addressing any potential instances of bullying. Pupils were able to discuss the actions they could take to remain safe, for example the actions needed to stay safe online and to avoid the threats posed by strangers. Pupils value opportunities to share any worries or anxieties during their 'red cushion' time. Pupils have had opportunities to work with the NSPCC and safety organisations to develop a closer understanding of their welfare needs and rights.

Inspection findings

- In 2018, the vast majority of pupils made strong progress from their starting points at the end of key stage 2 in reading and writing, and particularly strong progress in mathematics. In addition, the proportions of pupils achieving and exceeding expected standards was above those seen nationally. Progress was equally strong for disadvantaged pupils and particularly high for pupils with an education, health and care plan. A review of books supports the picture of strong progress for current pupils, with increasing proportions on track to achieve greater depths of understanding.
- In 2018, the proportion of pupils achieving expected standards in reading and mathematics was above that seen nationally at key stage 1. However, standards in writing were lower, particularly for boys and disadvantaged pupils. This has been an area of focus this year. In books, it is evident that pupils are making much stronger progress in their writing. This is reflected in higher standards of handwriting and pupils' greater confidence in sustaining narratives at length. For current pupils, the proportions achieving and exceeding expected standards are on course to rise again. This represents extremely strong progress from pupils' starting points. You recognise that building upon actions to increase the proportions of pupils working at greater depth at key stage one needs to remain a focus.
- Leaders have revitalised provision in the early years in recent years. They have established continuity between the two-year-old provision, the Nursery and the Reception class. This is providing children with a settled but stimulating learning environment. Teachers and teaching assistants know their children well. They communicate closely with parents to incorporate children's interests and experiences into the learning and play they provide. Adults provide a sound grounding in phonics and number work that helps children to be ready for Year 1. Adults provide deft support for children with SEND and additional needs. These

collective actions enable children to make very strong progress from their often below-typical starting points.

- Leaders have achieved much success in raising attendance. The attendance team tracks attendance closely and provides support and challenge to overcome barriers to attendance. Home–school mentors have established positive relationships with parents. Their actions are supported by the trust’s education welfare officer, who pursues attendance concerns diligently and effectively. These actions led to a marked improvement in attendance two years ago. These improvements have been sustained, with attendance levels now in line with those seen nationally and much better than in similar schools. Rates of persistent absence have significantly declined and are below those seen nationally.
- Pupils benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum that gives them access to rich experiences and builds cultural awareness. Termly topics often begin with trips or visitors, which provides a stimulating context for subsequent learning. Pupils develop an understanding of artists such as Gaudi, Picasso and Kandinsky and produce work influenced by their styles. They also acquire insight into history and aspects of scientific process. On occasions, pupils’ knowledge in the wider curriculum is not built upon with sufficient regularity or depth. Leaders recognise this and are currently developing initiatives to enrich the curriculum further.
- Pupils benefit from a thoughtfully planned personal, social, emotional and health curriculum. This thoughtfully develops their understanding of their emotions and of their growth and development. Leaders ensure that pupils develop an awareness of equality and of protected characteristics. This is reflected in the ‘Rights Respecting School’ status that the school has achieved. Pupils remember the messages learned in assemblies. For example, one pupil talked about the importance of not hurting the feelings of others, as even when the scrunched-up paper is unfolded, ‘the crease remains’.
- Leaders provide effective support for pupils with SEND. Within the social communication resourced provision, teachers and teaching assistants provide tailored support that enables pupils to engage productively in learning and manage their emotions and behaviour. Leaders have effective systems in place to track the progress made by pupils with SEND. A number of parents wrote to express how much they appreciated the level of support their children had received.
- Leaders use pupil premium funding effectively. Leaders encourage disadvantaged pupils to access trips, participate in clubs and activities and attend regularly, and check that they have done so. The culture of high aspirations they have built enables pupils to make strong progress and achieve high levels of attainment.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to develop the knowledge and skills that pupils acquire in the wider curriculum
- they build upon actions to further increase the proportions of pupils working at greater depths of understanding at key stage 1.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local governing body, the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Darlington. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Kirtley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

As part of the inspection, I explored whether the strong outcomes pupils achieved at the end of key stage 2 over the past two years were being sustained. I also investigated whether improvements in pupils' attendance had continued. I explored the progress made by pupils in key stage 1 and by children in the early years. I also considered the quality of the wider curriculum.

During the inspection, I met with you, your head of school and a wide range of middle leaders. I also spoke with four members of the governing body, including the chair. I held a meeting with a group of pupils and discussed pupils' learning with them in lessons. I met the chief executive officer of the Lingfield Trust and the trust's educational development partner. I looked, with the head of school, at learning in lessons. I also looked at pupils' work in books. I examined school improvement priorities and discussed pupils' progress. I looked at documents, including the school's self-evaluation, behaviour and attendance records and support plans for pupils with SEND. I examined safeguarding documents, including the single central record. I considered 15 responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire and 10 free-text responses from parents.