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5 July 2019

Mrs Tracey Taylor
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Taylor

Short inspection of Preston Grange Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 18 June 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 October 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. 'Achieve, challenge, enjoy' is the strapline of your school's vision. At Preston Grange pupils achieve well, are challenged in their learning and enjoy school. You are successful in keeping these themes central to education at your school.

'Compassionate yet determined' aptly describes your own leadership. One comment from a parent typifies that of many, saying that 'I have nothing but praise for all of the teachers and for the running of the school. All pupils are treated as individuals; their strengths are celebrated, any weaknesses identified, and support put into place.'

You know the areas of strength at school and where you need to further improve. Your own self-evaluation and associated school improvement plans are helpful documents that pinpoint how you are going to ensure that the school keeps on moving forward. For example, you have been focused on improving the progress that pupils make in writing. This has been effective. You have also noted that pupils need to develop a resilience in their learning and have been 'chipping away' at individuals to ensure that they do not give up, and that they keep on trying. You are passionate about making it clear to your pupils that they can succeed and that they can overcome any obstacles in their way.

Teaching at your school is characterised by a strong level of consistency. You work together effectively as a whole staff team to ensure that policies are developed that work at your school, and that everyone implements them. A striking example of this is the way in which pupils are challenged in classrooms. All pupils know that they need to work towards 'green for good' and then 'blue for brilliant'. Teachers know that they must shape learning by checking for any misconceptions on the part of the pupils. They return to these specific aspects of learning in the next lesson. Teachers help pupils to 'share, hone, improve and edit, focus on next steps, and extend their learning, ('SHINE') effectively.

Your school is an inclusive and caring community. Recently, the school 'owl logo' has been altered to include a rainbow flag as a background. This is because you and the school community wanted to underline the fact that all different types of family are welcomed and celebrated at school, and to make it clear to pupils that some families have two mums or two dads. Similarly, you ensure that pupils have an understanding of different cultures, different religions, and different abilities. As such, you are preparing your pupils well for life in modern Britain.

Staff morale is high. You care about your staff and want to see them develop in their careers. You make sure that there are opportunities available for them and support them in their development. You trust your members of staff and this is reciprocated. The governing body is effective. Members are skilled and experienced. You receive support and challenge from them in equal measure.

Parents are positive about communication with the school. Several told me that they 'always know what is going on' and that they 'appreciate tweets about what is happening at school'. They spoke animatedly about opportunities to learn about phonics and early mathematics teaching. They also appreciate hints and tips about e-safety that they receive, which help them to keep their children safe online.

You are not complacent and, under the direction of the governing body, you have been effective in addressing the areas for improvement as noted during the previous inspection. For example, the quality of teaching in mathematics has much improved and the progress that pupils make in this subject is now strong.

As a headteacher who knows her school, your development plans have identified several areas for further improvement. However, I also noted the relatively small number of pupils that reach higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics, given the ability of pupils at your school. Too few of your middle-ability pupils make the leap to reach these standards across their time with you. You are also aware that an increased focus on the progress that pupils make in subjects other than reading, writing and mathematics is needed. Nonetheless, you have a track record of school improvement; since the previous inspection there has been a positive step change in the progress that pupils make from their different starting points in both reading and mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

Your website states that you 'firmly believe that happy children learn best'. Your focus on ensuring that pupils are safe and happy is effective and helps them to remain focused on their learning. Your 'castle system' helps you to foster a cohesive and happy community. Pupils in each class are divided into teams, each of which is assigned a castle as a name. Pupils in each castle team earn points for hard work, effort, behaviour, and for contributing to the school community. What is more, pupils are taught certain themes and subjects through their castle teams. Together, children from Nursery through to pupils in Year 6 learn about keeping themselves safe, and the importance of healthy eating, for example. As a result, pupils from different year groups know each other well. This supports the caring ethos evident at your school.

Pupils are courteous and polite. They behave well in classrooms and move sensibly around the building. Pupils say that there is little bullying and that teachers deal effectively with any unkind words that are ever used. Parents and members of staff agree. They overwhelmingly state that pupils are safe at school and that adults at school are effective in keeping pupils safe.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Current checks on the suitability of adults to work with pupils are thorough. Staff training for issues linked to safeguarding is comprehensive. You have made sure that systems are in place to support any pupils and families that are particularly vulnerable. You work effectively with the leader of well-being, guidance and support to support families and to ensure that other agencies are involved should this be needed.

Parents with whom I spoke said that you use a variety of strategies to encourage and reward good behaviour and strong attendance. Last year you noted that rates of attendance slipped, and you acted swiftly to arrest this decline. Attendance continues to improve and the number of pupils that are persistently absent is decreasing. The curriculum that you offer, the care that is given, and the implementation of appropriate policies and procedures all combine to ensure that the safety of pupils has a high priority at school.

Inspection findings

- As part of the inspection I wanted to find out how pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported. Your special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) is highly organised and has ensured that effective systems are in place for identifying pupils with SEND. Your school has specific expertise in supporting pupils with dyslexia. Within school there is a clear line of sight between any support plans that are in place for individual pupils and the provision that they are receiving, either in classrooms or in small-group work. Additional documentation for teachers and teaching assistants about how to meet individual pupils' needs is helpful.
- During the inspection I listened to some pupils with SEND read, in addition to

some pupils whose standards in reading are below average. Teaching assistants are effective in supporting these pupils. These members of staff have a strong understanding of how to teach phonics. They question pupils well to help to move them on in their reading, either in their phonics skills or in their comprehension of texts.

- I also wanted to focus on how well writing is taught at school. This is because historically pupils have made less progress in this subject than in reading and mathematics. The leadership of writing at school is now effective. No stone has been left unturned in seeking to improve this area of school life. You have a well-thought-out plan to improve writing, and inspection evidence confirms that this is having a positive impact. Pupils are writing with increasing fluency, accuracy and in a range of different styles. Right through the school there is an emphasis on developing writing skills, from developing gross and fine motor skills in Nursery and Reception through to pupils in key stage 2 being supported to write with confidence, while including a variety of linguistic structures.
- The development of 'free writing' is of note. Here, pupils write creatively, at length, without the constraints of a list of success criteria. At your school, not only do pupils continue to use a variety of structures in their writing, they have developed more of a love of writing. This, combined with more focused work in literacy books, is helping your pupils to make greater gains in this subject. The progress that pupils make in writing, although improving as a result of the strategies that you have put into place, still lags behind that of reading and mathematics, however.
- Another line of enquiry was linked to the teaching of mathematics. Pupils have been making increasingly strong progress in this area. At your school pupils benefit from a structured approach that is consistently applied. Teachers ensure that pupils think deeply about mathematical concepts, talk through their thinking, and apply their knowledge well when solving problems. During the inspection, pupils were able to tell me with confidence exactly what they were learning and exactly how to perform the calculations that were the focus of the lesson.
- The senior leader with responsibility for mathematics has a strong understanding of the subject. Plans for further improvement are based on a detailed analysis of past achievement data. This leader has ensured that teachers plan well so that pupils with different levels of understanding are pushed forward in their learning.
- Your website highlights the emphasis that you place on subjects other than English and mathematics and I wanted to see how you ensure that pupils develop their knowledge across the curriculum. Although a wide range of subjects are studied, you and your team have audited the curriculum and have concluded that developments are required. I agree. In some subjects, progress across year groups can be seen, but this is not consistent. In geography, for example, pupils develop a deeper understanding of subject-specific vocabulary across key stage 2. However, as you highlighted, 'teachers plan for topics and not necessarily for progress'. This was evident from exercise books and when speaking to pupils. Subjects were often 'shoe horned' into topics without reference to progress in knowledge or skills of these subject areas.
- Although not a focus for this inspection, I noticed the improvements that have

taken place in the teaching of reading at school. Your focus on individual class texts and developing reading skills through 'reading journals' is effective. Pupils spoke with enthusiasm about reading and the books that they have studied at school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the progress that pupils make in writing continues to improve
- a greater proportion of pupils reach higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics
- teachers plan for pupils to make progress in subjects other than reading, writing and mathematics consistently and effectively.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Wardle
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders. I spoke with members of the governing body, including the chair. I met with a group of teachers responsible for some of the foundation subjects. I talked to those members of staff with responsibility for safeguarding, attendance and behaviour.

I spoke to a group of parents at the beginning of the day, and I spoke with two groups of pupils formally. I talked informally to others across the course of the inspection. I observed teaching and learning with members of the senior team, and reviewed pupils' work from different year groups and from a variety of subjects. I spoke with the SENCo and together we looked at how well teachers were meeting the needs of individual pupils. I listened to some pupils read. You presented the school development plan, the school's self-evaluation document and information detailing pupils' progress and attainment. A variety of other documents were considered, including those relating to safeguarding and policies on the school's website. I considered the 82 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire, the 28 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and the 65 responses to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire, Parent View, including free-text entries.