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Mrs Susan Sharpe
Headteacher
Golden Flatts Primary School
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Dear Mrs Sharpe

Short inspection of Golden Flatts Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 July 2017, 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your strong and determined leadership and your collective ambition to meet the challenges faced by many of your pupils is very evident. Golden Flatts Primary School is a caring school that provides a safe and nurturing environment in which pupils thrive. Members of staff skilfully balance a focus on pupil welfare with a determination to deliver academic success. As a result, the individual needs of pupils are catered for very well, enabling them to make good progress.

In the previous inspection, you were asked to raise standards in writing. Since then, standards have risen steadily. Pupils have made more rapid progress because teachers set very clear learning objectives and help pupils to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses in their own work. Pupils appreciate the specific targets set for them and routinely use the feedback that teachers provide to edit and improve their work. This year, a focus on handwriting has led to considerable improvements in the quality of presentation. My scrutiny of books showed that pupils across key stage 2 confidently develop the skills to write for different audiences and purposes. Many pupils write at length in a number of subjects, skilfully combining different sentence structures and using rich vocabulary to give their work colour and life. Some pupils however, make too many spelling errors, which teachers do not always identify and challenge. Although the proportion of pupils attaining the expected standard in writing dipped just below the national average last year, provisional

results for 2017 show that four out of five pupils attained the expected standard, and a quarter reached the higher level.

You were also asked in the previous inspection to strengthen the quality of teaching. Since then, you have provided your staff with good training and development opportunities. You commissioned training from a teaching school to help your staff develop the characteristics of outstanding teaching and have provided accredited leadership development programmes for your middle leaders. They, in turn, provide good coaching support for less experienced teachers in the school. Your monitoring of teaching indicates that all teachers are performing well and make a positive contribution to pupils' progress.

Despite securing improvements in teaching and in the quality of writing, some inconsistencies in pupils' outcomes remain. Children make a strong start in the early years and progress well across key stage 1. However, rates of progress in reading, writing and mathematics are less consistent in key stage 2. Last year, pupils made only broadly average progress, and provisional outcomes for 2017 indicate that, in reading, some pupils fell short of the expected standard. Leaders need to be mindful that any variability across subjects needs to be identified and tackled early, so that all pupils, especially the disadvantaged, build effectively on the strong start that they make lower down the school.

Having been headteacher at the school for 11 years, you have decided to move on to another headship at the end of this term. The governors have put in place interim leadership arrangements until a substantive appointment of a new headteacher can be made. Although the governing body of your new school, Lynnfield Primary, has agreed to release you to mentor the interim headteacher, governors should also seek to arrange additional external support for leadership over this period, to ensure that the school's drive for improvement is maintained.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding of pupils and support and care for the most vulnerable has a high priority at Golden Flatts Primary. All members of staff receive frequent up-to-date training and take action if they have any concerns about a child's safety. Referrals made to you in your role as the designated safeguarding leader are managed sensitively and in a timely manner. Partnerships with external agencies are effective. You ensure that records of good quality are maintained.

The school has a relatively high number of pupils who are looked after by the local authority and an above-average proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. To meet their needs, you have established good counselling support and developed facilities to help pupils in crisis or struggling to cope. Staff have received specialist training to meet pupils' social and emotional needs. Partnerships with parents are strong. Pupils benefit considerably from the support they receive and many make good progress academically, despite the difficulties they face.

Inspection findings

- Children make a good start in the early years. Accepting some children before they turn three years old has proved successful; they make good progress in the Nursery. Accurate assessment of need and good teaching ensure that children with starting points well below those expected for their age make strong progress. You have used early years pupil premium funding wisely to provide specialist teaching for speech and communication skills. Last year, the proportion of children attaining a good level of development by the end of the Reception year rose to be in line with the national average. Provisional assessments for this year show further improvement, with all the disadvantaged children in the cohort reaching the expected standard.
- The teaching of reading skills in the early years and key stage 1 is a strength of the school. Outcomes in the Year 1 national phonics screening check have been consistently above the national average since the last inspection. Pupils quickly progress from learning the sounds that letters make to reading fluently. Pupils who fall short of the expected standard receive regular additional support and nearly all attain the standard when retested in Year 2. In key stage 2, pupils regularly read texts together, and teachers guide pupils effectively to develop their depth of understanding and ability to infer meaning. Some teachers, however, do not expect pupils to answer in full sentences or to use specific vocabulary, which limits the quality of their responses.
- You have refined your approach to tracking pupils' progress and now have very tight systems in place. Teachers and governors receive a thorough analysis of the progress made by each class at key points across the year. These analyses are used as the context for pupil progress meetings, which hold teachers tightly to account. Good additional support is provided for pupils at risk of falling behind. This includes after-school tutoring of small groups delivered by teachers and higher-level teaching assistants. Pupils told me that they really value this support. Although your assessment and tracking of pupil progress is sophisticated, outcomes in this year's key stage 2 reading test were well below your prediction. Initial analysis of their test papers shows that pupils did not demonstrate strong enough comprehension skills. I looked closely at the books and assessments of pupils who fell short of the standard. I agree that these pupils had consistently demonstrated the expected standard in their assessed work across Year 6. Nevertheless, leaders should now conduct a thorough review of why outcomes in reading dipped this year and ensure that the curriculum across key stage 2 fully develops pupils' reading skills to at least the expected standard.
- Your plans for improvement this year have included a focus on reducing the proportion of pupils who miss school regularly. Last year, the level of persistent absence was well above the national average. Your focused efforts this year, in partnership with the local authority attendance team, have reduced this. Even so, persistent absences for this year remain above the 2016 national average. A key issue is the number of families who take unauthorised holidays during term time. You have not fined families in the past for poor attendance, although governors are considering reviewing their attendance policy and introducing the use of fines

to send a clear message to the community. Further improving attendance and reducing persistent absence remain a priority for the school.

- Nearly two thirds of pupils come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and many of them enter the school with skills well below those typical for their age. In recent years, the attainment of disadvantaged pupils has lagged behind that of other pupils nationally at the end of each key stage. Although disadvantaged pupils make similar progress to other pupils nationally, the gap between their attainment and that of other pupils has not closed consistently across different subjects. Your assessments for 2017 show these gaps are now being tackled more effectively. The gap has been closed in the early years and reduced significantly at key stage 1. In other classes, gaps are narrowing due to the well-targeted additional support being provided. Some variability remains, however, because in some year groups disadvantaged pupils have complex needs, which inhibit their academic progress.
- The governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Records of their meetings show that they scrutinise the progress that pupils make across the year and ask probing questions about the impact of leaders' work. Governors set appropriate objectives for you and ensure that the performance of teachers is managed robustly. The governors are strongly committed to ensuring that the school continues to move forwards in the interim period until a new headteacher can be appointed.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the teaching of reading, in particular comprehension skills, is improved so that outcomes in reading at the end of key stage 2 are at least in line with those in writing and mathematics
- pupils routinely spell common words correctly and learn to spell subject-specific vocabulary to a high order
- overall attendance improves and persistent absence reduces to at least match levels seen nationally.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you and the assistant headteacher (who will become the interim headteacher in September) and a group of governors, including the vice-chair of the governing body. I also met with a group of pupils and listened to some of them read. Together we visited lessons to look at the impact of your work to develop the quality of teaching. During lesson visits, I sampled pupils' books and talked to pupils about their learning and progress. I looked in detail at some pupils' work with the curriculum leaders for literacy and numeracy, in order to evaluate the progress that pupils had made across the year. I walked around the school site and talked to pupils informally at social times. I met with a group of parents and looked at the five free-text responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also considered the 10 responses to the staff survey and the 12 responses to the pupil survey. I looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, policies, assessment information, the pupil premium strategy and other information available on the school website. I focused particularly on the progress made by pupils in key stage 2, standards in writing, levels of attendance and the school's work to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.