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Miss Rebecca Jackson  
Headteacher  
Hexham First School  
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Dear Miss Jackson

### **Short inspection of Hexham East First School**

Following my visit to the school on 3 May 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 February 2012.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since taking up post as headteacher at Hexham First in September 2015, you have led the school with a clear sense of purpose: you are determined that all pupils should experience the very best. Your staff share your vision and morale is high. Pupils are well behaved and enjoy coming to school and are very proud of the work they do. Relationships between staff and pupils are open, friendly and rooted in mutual respect. Pupils know that they can rely on the staff to care for and challenge them. You, as headteacher, have developed and encouraged this culture where learning, kindness and hard work are the norm.

The school's previous inspection in February 2012 identified the need to improve the way leaders monitor the work of the school. Working with governors and the whole staff, you have addressed this very successfully. You have developed detailed plans and methodical actions for improving the school further that are rooted in the highest expectations for all. You have also put in place robust and systematic ways of checking the impact of these actions. You and your team monitor the quality of teaching and pupils' progress regularly and carefully. Pupils told me that they knew how well they were doing and what they needed to do to improve. They said that this is because they receive frequent and detailed feedback on their learning and meet regularly with their teachers for one-to-one mentoring sessions to discuss progress.

You expect the highest standards from your team of staff; they respond very positively to these expectations. All staff, teachers and teaching assistants alike, have opportunities to extend and develop their skills and practice through visits to other schools and the professional development links the school has with Newcastle University.

Parents are very positive about the work of the school and hold the school in high regard. They told me that they particularly welcomed the ready accessibility of you and your staff because it meant that they were regularly updated on how well their children were doing. They said that this was a real strength of the school and of your leadership.

You are very ambitious for your school and clear that there is still work to be done to improve the quality of education it offers even further. The teaching of the 'core' subjects of reading, writing, mathematics and science is very effective and well developed. The opportunities that pupils have to develop and deepen their skills in and love of reading, for example, have clearly had a positive impact. You continue to work imaginatively with your team of staff to develop and deepen pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding of other subjects in the school's curriculum. There are clear signs of successful learning in, for example, religious education, art and music. Even so you are aware that there is still more that can be done to deepen and extend pupils' learning across the full spectrum of subjects.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

You have created and maintain a strong culture of safeguarding. This pervades the whole school. You ensure that there is regular and effective training for all staff and governors to ensure that they are up to date in their knowledge and understanding of safeguarding.

You, as the designated safeguarding lead, have very strong and determined links with the relevant outside agencies. You record your dealings with these agencies in a detailed and meticulous manner. You follow safeguarding issues through effectively and engage with the local authority promptly. As a result, you ensure that any safeguarding issues that do arise are addressed fully and well by a wide range of professionals

### **Inspection findings**

- Children settle quickly into the Nursery and the Reception classes. This is because of the careful transition arrangements that the early years leader has put in place. Staff know the children very well. They carefully plan and shape activities and experiences that help the children thrive and grow in confidence. As a result, children soon grow to understand, enjoy and respond positively to school routines. Staff monitor each child's progress very regularly and carefully.

They use a wide range of strategies to keep parents informed and fully involved in their children's progress, welfare and learning. These include being fully available for parents at the start and end of the school day, and the imaginative use of the internet so that parents are kept informed about their child's progress. Parents told me that they really welcomed the accessibility of staff and the care and attention to detail that the school demonstrated. They liked the way that they were able to follow their child's progress and successes vividly online.

- Children in the early years are safe and happy. The school's systems for keeping children safe are regularly reviewed, diligently applied and effective. Children in the early years show real consideration for each other. They are kind. They work and play well together. Both boys and girls are making clear and assured progress in their learning. The environment, both inside and outside, is interesting, comfortable, reassuring and conducive to happiness and learning.
- The school's support and provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is very effective. The leader of this work has ensured that there are clear and rigorous systems in place to measure the impact of the specially targeted support these pupils receive. These pupils' parents are fully involved and kept up to date. As a result these pupils make good progress. You are imaginative and prompt in the ways that you respond to pupils' needs as they arise. For example, you have used additional government funding to supply targeted one-to-one support from specialist physical education (PE) staff to help pupils develop their precise physical skills; this has had a positive impact on their learning and spatial awareness.
- During the inspection I looked at the quality of the teaching of mathematics across the school because, in the past, outcomes in mathematics have not been as good as those for reading and writing. You have addressed the comparatively weaker performance in mathematics effectively. You and your leader for mathematics have used careful analysis of pupils' progress and outcomes in the subject to identify the areas of mathematics that needed addressing. The leader for mathematics has worked effectively with the whole staff to develop their skills, particularly around problem solving and more 'open ended' mathematical activities. As a result, staff are more skilled and confident and teaching in this subject is now good. Inspection evidence supports this.
- Another area I looked at was the historically poorer attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Again, you and your team have addressed this very effectively. Attendance for these pupils is now very similar to that of their peers in the school. It is very close to the national average and improving. This success is rooted in your school's detailed knowledge of your families and your own high expectations of attendance. You have been relentless in applying a wide range of imaginative strategies to support the children and families who find regular attendance challenging. You have successfully established a culture where very regular attendance is the accepted norm. You are, however, not content with this and recognise that there is still more to be done to improve attendance even further.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there continues to be a focus on ensuring that all pupils attend school regularly
- the curriculum beyond the 'core' of English, mathematics and science continues to develop so that pupils, including the most able, have opportunities to extend and deepen their subject-specific skills, knowledge and understanding across the whole curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Evans  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

I visited all classes, most of them accompanied by either you or your deputy, to observe teaching, learning and assessment. During these visits, where appropriate, I spoke with teachers and teaching assistants about their work. I also checked pupils' progress in their books, talked formally with a group of pupils from Year 2 and talked informally with pupils in lessons, around the school and at lunchtime.

I met with groups of parents at the beginning and end of the day. I met with you to discuss the school's effectiveness and what you have done to ensure that the school continues to improve. I also met with the mathematics and literacy leaders, two governors, including the chair and vice-chair of the governing body, and with the coordinator of the school's work to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SENDCo). I also spoke with the governor who oversees the work of the SENDCo on the telephone.

I met with an officer from Northumberland local authority to find out about the authority's view of the school.

I read a range of documents, including your evaluation of the school's effectiveness. I also scrutinised the school's safeguarding systems, records and associated documents. I checked information about pupils' achievement along with external evaluations of aspects of the school's work. I also read minutes of meetings of the governing body. I considered 33 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View), 30 free-text comments from parents and seven responses from staff.