

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Mrs Debbie Brett  
Headteacher  
Slaley First School  
Slaley Village  
Hexham  
Northumberland  
NE47 0AA

Dear Mrs Brett

### **Short inspection of Slaley First School**

Following my visit to the school on 23 January 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 March 2015.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Following your appointment as headteacher, you have worked tenaciously to develop a school culture of high aspiration and collegiality. Working alongside the skilled and experienced key stage 1 leader, you have set about necessary school improvement with an infectious energy and drive. Your strong leadership has rightly focused on the nitty-gritty of teaching and learning. There is now a real sense of unity among the school team and the wider school community.

Establishing an ethic of teamwork and developing a shared ambition to provide the best opportunities for pupils have been significant successes. These elements underpin school life. There is a tangible sense of purpose, energy and uncompromising ambition to see all pupils flourish, both academically and in their all-round development. Teachers teach with enthusiasm. They provide pupils with excellent resources that bring topics to life. They hold high expectations. These are clearly reflected in the great care that all pupils take with the presentation of their work and neat handwriting. As a result, pupils' books for this academic year already show that they have made considerable progress.

In the last inspection, leaders were asked to further improve the quality of teaching so more was outstanding. You were also asked to raise attainment in mathematics. As a result, you instigated a detailed review of planning and resources. The daily focus on key knowledge and mental calculation in 'early birds' and a review of daily timetables have been introduced to ensure that no learning time is lost. There is still

some work to do on developing pupils' skills in reasoning activities in mathematics. Teachers scrupulously follow the school's marking and feedback policy. This has ensured that pupils are given time to respond to feedback and provides a focused learning experience in both English and mathematics.

The school was also asked to strengthen the role of middle leaders at the last inspection, especially in terms of checking on action plans in their key stage. Senior leaders attend timetabled leadership meetings across the year, which ensures crystal-clear lines of communication. Leaders also contribute to reports for governors and attend partnership and network meetings with other local schools. They contribute significantly to school development planning. I found that the true partnership approach between all leaders is a key strength of the school.

Leaders are fully involved in the annual calendar of monitoring and evaluation, undertaking lesson observations, analysing work in books and leading meetings to discuss pupils' progress. These rigorous and robust systems ensure that school development planning is based on accurate and perceptive self-evaluation. Leaders agree that the recent focus on the quality of teaching in all subjects has resulted in higher expectations of pupils. This more rigorous approach needs to be further embedded to ensure maximum effect on learning.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Policies, procedures and records are of good quality, up to date and fit for purpose. They are effectively maintained and reviewed by the office manager. You and the chair of governors undertake regular checks on all statutory documentation. The adults who are trained as designated safeguarding leaders fulfil their role with great responsibility and attention to detail. The school's use of a comprehensive and detailed system to record concerns on the 'pink forms' ensures that every piece of information, no matter how small, is considered carefully and not lost. The school system is closely tied to detailed records of behaviour held in each class. These systems robustly record every meeting and telephone call you make connected to pupils' welfare.

The culture of keeping pupils safe and putting them at the heart of the inclusive, friendly school community is evident. Pupils categorically state that no bullying happens at school at any time. Pupils' behaviour is good. They have regular teaching on staying safe out of school and e-safety. A detailed local authority audit of e-safety was completed last summer. All action points were quickly put into place.

Pupils have full trust in their teachers and teaching assistants who look after them. They report that they feel safe all of the time. In the responses to the inspection questionnaire, no parent suggested that their child was unsafe at school. Every respondent would recommend the school to another parent. I read many positive comments from parents during the inspection, such as, 'My child feels safe and very well cared for,' and, 'the environment created by staff and pupils is positive and

caring. The school provides a strong support system for children and parents.' Following my visit, I would concur with these views.

## **Inspection findings**

- You have worked hard to refocus the school on its core purpose of teaching and learning. You acknowledge that the challenge and support from the skilled and experienced local authority improvement partner have been of considerable value in this process. You quickly made changes in the teaching of phonics and placed a new emphasis on mental mathematics and basic calculations. A tightened daily timetable has eradicated any lost learning time. These changes have already significantly improved pupils' progress in learning. The redeployment of some staff in school and the recruitment of new staff have been closely aligned to the needs of pupils across the school. You have ensured that teachers have a strong and clear understanding of the curriculum. Teachers plan learning based on ongoing daily assessments. These ensure that activities are closely matched to pupils' needs. The school has benefited from a recent review of the wider curriculum, in which expectations of pupils have been raised in every subject. Teachers are clear about the skills taught in all subjects and are adept at assessing what pupils know and can do. There is further work to do in embedding this more rigorous approach to see its full effect on learning.
- Purposeful partnership work with schools in the Hexham cluster has enhanced teachers' understanding of the components of high standards. They have worked closely with colleagues to moderate examples of pupils' work. I found that teachers make creative use of the extensive school grounds to support learning. They also draw on the skills of people in the locality. For example, design technology projects have been enhanced by working with the Women's Institute Craft Club. Pupils' understanding of capacity and measurement has been boosted through cookery sessions with a local resident.
- There is a tangible thread running through all aspects of the school that ensures that pupils are valued and safe and that their all-round development is nurtured. This is valued highly by governors. They told me of the developing resilience of pupils and their respect for each other and their school. The school council plays an active part in school life. It has worked hard to produce a dining room charter to ensure that everyone's rights are respected. The use of quiet voices, good manners and the correct use of cutlery ensures a calm and enjoyable lunchtime. The cook has ensured that meals are of a high standard.
- Pupils and their parents and carers value the interaction between pupils of all ages, typified by the buddy system, at breaktime. One parent spoke affectionately about how her child in the Reception class was being taught to play chess by a Year 4 pupil. The school is truly at the heart of the village, with its grounds open to residents during out-of-school hours. Annual events such as the summer fair, or carol singing in the village pub, form an integral part of village life. Pupil numbers are small and relationships are strong. Every adult knows each pupil extremely well. This enables them to adapt teaching to meet every child's individual needs.

- You have ensured that attainment targets set for pupils are both ambitious but realistic. I found that the work in books aligned closely with the school's assessment of the progress pupils were making. The school's tracking systems clearly show that virtually all pupils are on track to meet their targets and are making good progress. Historic differences, that showed pupils achieved more highly in reading, have been eradicated. Pupils achieve equally well in writing and mathematics. Provisional assessment data, from the end of Reception, shows that nearly all children reached a good level of development. In addition, a much larger proportion of children, above that found nationally, were exceeding the early learning goals. A much greater proportion of pupils are working at a greater depth in their learning in key stages 1 and 2 compared with last year. As pupil numbers are so small, trends in data or analysis of different groups are unreliable. You have rightly concentrated on analysing each pupil's achievement on an individual basis. The school is now addressing the recent issue of a rising number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. A range of new initiatives and strategies are in place.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- provide pupils with regular opportunities to explain and justify their thinking in mathematical reasoning activities
- maintain the changes to ensure rigour and high expectations in teaching across all curricular subjects.

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

Phil Scott  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you and the key stage 1 leader. I held a meeting with three governors, including the chair of the governing body. I met with the school's office manager and held a telephone conversation with the school's improvement adviser. Alongside you, I visited lessons in each key stage and reviewed a sample of pupils' workbooks. I spoke to pupils about their work and their views of the school. I observed behaviour at breaktime and considered a range of documents relating to safeguarding. I examined the school development plan and the school's evaluation of its own performance. I scrutinised records of the

evaluation of teaching and learning and of current pupils' progress and attainment. I analysed the published data of statutory assessments for 2016, 2017 and 2018. I reviewed the 13 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 11 responses to the staff questionnaire. In addition, I scrutinised the school's website.