

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Mr Tim Cassap  
Headteacher  
Stephenson Way Academy and Nursery School  
Stephenson Way  
Newton Aycliffe  
County Durham  
DL5 7DD

Dear Mr Cassap

### **Short inspection of Stephenson Way Academy and Nursery School**

Following my visit to the school on 20 February 2018, 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 April 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

The previous inspection report challenged leaders to provide a wider range of enrichment activities to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. You are rightly proud of your endeavours in this regard. Pupils now experience an enhanced curriculum which you tailor creatively to meet their interests. Staff and pupils share a warm rapport. Pupils told me that they feel safe and enjoy school. They find many tasks and much of their learning 'fun'. Pupils particularly appreciate the numerous extra-curricular clubs and stimulating events, trips, visits and visitors that colour their daily experiences. Inquisitive, spirited and respectful pupils adorn the school. Their positive attitudes and good conduct are a result of your committed investment in this area of pupils' development.

Recommendations from the previous report requested you to accelerate pupils' progress across subjects and so raise overall attainment. Evidence gathered during this inspection demonstrates numerous successes. While the proportion of children reaching a good level of development in the early years is still lower than the national figure, it has increased steadily over time. You have successfully improved the quality of teaching and learning of phonics in Year 1; pupils' outcomes in 2017 rose to be in line with those in other schools nationally. The proportion of pupils reaching expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 2 improved in 2017 to match national averages.

Notwithstanding these evident improvements, you have accurately identified reading as an area requiring further attention. Not all pupils read regularly with adults in school or at home. Although rising, the proportion of pupils in the early years meeting the early learning goal for reading remains below national averages. In key stage 1, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils reaching expected standards in reading is lower than the national average over time. Leaders have not yet embedded systems for monitoring and tracking all pupils' progress in reading, effectively. Consequently, not all pupils are making rapid progress from their different starting points in reading.

Leadership and management of the wider curriculum is, quite rightly, on your radar for development. Pupils thoroughly enjoy science, for example, showing enthusiasm and interest in scientific investigations especially. You have worked with staff to increase opportunities for pupils to write scientifically. This is beginning to equip pupils in upper key stage 2 with a deeper understanding of some scientific concepts and specific terminology. Pupils' outcomes in science in key stage 1, however, remain below the national average over time. Pupils' books show that work does not always challenge the most able pupils, in particular, in their learning. Subject leaders do not yet monitor teaching and learning in science thoroughly or systematically. You agree that leaders do not, therefore, have an accurate picture of pupils' progress across groups or over time.

Vulnerable pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are well looked after in your caring, happy school. The social, emotional and personal needs of pupils are of paramount importance to you and your staff. A trained and experienced special educational needs coordinator works with a committed team of colleagues in the school to seek out additional expertise and resources to support pupils and families in this regard. However, leaders' assessment and tracking systems do not capture precisely the academic achievement of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. The manner in which leaders obtain information about this group's progress during interventions is not watertight. This means that pupils' progress across subjects is too vague and the actual value of different interventions is unclear.

Following the previous inspection, you were tasked to further improve pupils' rates of attendance. You took the requirement seriously. Your leadership team swiftly implemented a range of strategies to support pupils and families to understand the importance of good attendance. You have had a measure of success recently. Some pupils who were regularly absent from school improved their attendance due to your actions. Overall attendance, however, remains below the national average and the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent remains high compared to national figures. Disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities, especially, remain vulnerable to the potentially negative effects of poor attendance. Your improvement planning shows that you understand the pressing need to address this area of the school's work rapidly.

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Detailed and well-maintained records support your work to safeguard pupils effectively.

Adults throughout your school heed their responsibilities to protect and care for pupils diligently. Vulnerable pupils and families are well supported by your close liaison with external agencies and experts. There is a tangible desire among staff to ensure that all pupils and families feel welcome and valued. This is a warm and inviting environment in which the ethos is positive. Respect between staff and pupils is mutual. This means that pupils and families feel confident that they have adults in school whom they can approach if they have concerns.

You make sure that staff have regular training and updates about child protection and safeguarding matters. You have worked closely with your administration and support team to tweak systems for monitoring staff and governors' attendance at these training events even more thoroughly, to make sure no one misses essential messages. Consequently, staff know what to do and to whom they should refer any concerns they may have. This is a vital and effective component in your work to protect and care for pupils.

## **Inspection findings**

- You have successfully established a warm and positive ethos across both the upper and lower sites of the school. Pupils feel secure in the knowledge that they are held in high regard and respected by adults. It is vitally important to you and your staff that pupils have room to 'grow' into well-rounded individuals. You want pupils to experience a wealth of enrichment opportunities that encourages them to expand their horizons and 'be all they can be'. Your attention to the extra-curricular opportunities that pupils can access and the abundance of smiles and happy faces across the school are testament to this.
- You have raised the profile of reading across the school and it is central to your improvement planning. Most teachers read aloud to pupils, regularly, books are used as rewards for pupils' efforts and there is a clear expectation that pupils should read regularly with parents at home. Pupils say they like books and reading. However, not all children and pupils in the early years and in key stage 1 reach the standards that should be expected of them in reading. This is because subject leaders' monitoring of reading and assessments systems are not yet thorough. Leaders do not capture information for all groups of pupils consistently, or pupils' progress from their different starting points precisely.
- You support a high proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities in their learning in comparison to other schools nationally. Families and the local authority have faith in your capabilities in meeting the needs of SEN and vulnerable pupils effectively. Trained school staff work in close partnership with children's services, the police, educational psychologists and other experts to help pupils get the right resources in a timely manner. As a result, this group of pupils make strong progress in their social, emotional and personal development. Leaders do not, however, monitor or track the academic progress of pupils who

have SEN and/or disabilities meticulously across interventions, subjects or year groups. Over time, the proportion of pupils reaching expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics in each key stage is low in comparison to other pupils nationally from similar starting points.

- Pupils say that they enjoy science. They are particularly excited about practical and investigative work that they have undertaken, although some say such tasks do not happen as often as they would like. Work in pupils' books shows that not all pupils undertake scientific study regularly and, at times, work lacks challenge, particularly for the most able. Leaders' assessment information in science is patchy and does not capture a comprehensive picture of all pupils' progress.
- You are determined to improve pupils' life chances by securing good attendance and eradicating regular absence. Together with your team, supported by the local authority, with whom you work closely, you have implemented a range of strategies to achieve your goals in this regard. There are rewards for good attendance, regular communication with parents to raise awareness of its importance and senior leaders carefully track the attendance of pupils across each key stage. Despite your efforts, you and governors understand that attendance remains a critical improvement priority. Over time, pupils' attendance has remained below national averages and the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent remains too high in comparison to other schools.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all pupils make rapid progress from their different starting points in reading, particularly disadvantaged pupils in key stage 1 and children in the early years
- subject leaders monitor the quality of teaching and learning in science accurately and track all groups of pupils' progress closely, including the most able
- leaders' systems for tracking the academic progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are thorough
- pupils' attendance improves to at least match national averages, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities.

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

Yours sincerely

Fiona Manuel  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, I met with you, the acting headteacher and senior and subject leaders. I jointly observed teaching, learning and assessment in all key stages with you and the acting headteacher. I scrutinised work in pupils' books and reading records and listened to pupils reading in lessons. I spoke with pupils from each key stage. There were no responses by pupils to Ofsted's online questionnaire. I reviewed school documentation and information, including policies, assessment information, monitoring files and your school improvement plans. I met with governors, including the chair of the governing body, representatives from the local authority and the chief executive officer of Tudhoe Learning Trust. I took account of three free-text comments and four responses by parents to Parent View. I also considered the 25 responses from staff to Ofsted's online questionnaire.