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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Debbie Hughes
Headteacher
Westlea Primary School
Winslow Crescent
Westlea Estate
Seaham
County Durham
SR7 8JU

Dear Mrs Hughes

Short inspection of Westlea Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 October 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 October 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have worked very effectively to maintain a culture of mutual respect, high expectations and hard work at the school. Your school is characterised by the happiness and eagerness with which pupils and staff engage with each other and their learning. You know your community, your staff and your pupils very well and you use this knowledge to ensure continued improvement. You have established a team of senior staff who are well placed, under your guidance, to foster further improvement at the school. Staff morale is high. Overall, as a learning community, you are united in your desire to remove barriers to pupils' learning so that they can thrive and reach their potential.

Your governors also know the school and its community well. They are ambitious for the school and know where there needs to be further improvement. However, the governing body has only recently come up to full complement and there is some variation and uncertainty in roles and responsibilities. Governors are fully aware of this and are working with you and the local authority to sharpen their focus further so that they are better able to use their increasingly detailed knowledge and expertise to support and challenge you and other senior leaders.

Pupils at Westlea Primary love their school. They thrive on the teaching, care and challenge that they receive. They know that they can absolutely rely on adults at the school to stimulate and encourage them to learn and keep them safe. They also

welcome the opportunities the school gives them to take on responsibilities such as those of playground buddies, trolley monitors, school councillors, librarians and assembly sound technicians. They study a wide range of subjects in the curriculum, including religious education. This curriculum is supported by a very wide range of extra-curricular activities, including music, which many pupils take up. For example, I watched a rehearsal of the school's 30-strong brass ensemble. At the end of the piece, the conductor from the Durham County music service asked if anyone had any questions. After a short pause, one pupil was heard to exclaim, 'That was epic!' The burst of happy laughter that followed suggested that all agreed.

Parents and carers are very complimentary about the school. The parents with whom I spoke at the start and end of the school day were very positive about the high-quality teaching and communications at the school. They said that you and your staff were accessible and very ready to address any issues they may have. They also said that they acknowledged and welcomed the ways in which the school offered them opportunities to see their children's work and success in school.

The school's previous inspection in October 2012 identified the need to share good practice among staff so that the quality of teaching overall improved. This was particularly the case with the quality of staff's questioning of pupils and their work. You and your team have addressed this aspect of teaching effectively. I saw evidence of staff, both teachers and assistants, challenging pupils to extend and deepen their learning through persistent, well-focused questioning. I also saw evidence of the very positive environment of learning and enquiry in which this questioning took place; an environment in which it is all right to make a mistake and learn from it. For example, I saw a small group of pupils working with a teaching assistant on a particularly knotty mathematical problem. In response to a pupil's answer, she asked, 'Why do you think that is wrong?' The pupil was not taken aback by this, but pressed on to find the answer. This move from asking mundane 'what' questions to more testing and trying questions of 'why' and 'how' is very much in evidence in your school. It is the result of conscious and careful work and training by you and other leaders. It is leading to better outcomes and pleasure in learning for your pupils.

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 and pervasive culture of safeguarding at the school. You, all the staff at the school and the governing body take safeguarding responsibilities very seriously. 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 strong and effective 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.

Attendance is improving because of the effective and imaginative actions you and your team have taken to help remove the barriers that some pupils and their families have to good attendance.

Inspection findings

- Children settle well into the Nursery and Reception classes because your early years leader and her team are very skilled. They develop strong and open links with parents and combine these with high expectations for all. Children are happy at school and look forward to it. There are clear routines that children quickly understand and follow. These routines, along with the care that staff take in their work with children, ensure that children are safe. Children develop independence and pleasure in their learning both indoors and outdoors. This is because the environment is carefully designed and maintained to support learning and exploration. Staff monitor the progress that children make and use their observations to plan next steps for each child. They use the information they gather to put additional support in place for children who need it. Reading is a strength in early years. Book bags go home each day. The habit of reading is established. Phonics is well taught and children take pleasure in words and books.
- Your staff show good and outstanding knowledge of a wide range of subjects. They monitor pupils' progress carefully across the school. They use the information they gather to inform and focus their planning. As a result, the quality of teaching continues to improve and is good overall. Your school's classrooms, and the shared and play areas are attractive, lively and litter free. There is a good balance of pupils' work and other displays to stimulate and support learning. Teaching assistants are skilled and well deployed. Teachers and assistants share planning and discuss pupils' progress regularly to ensure that no pupil is left behind and that the most able pupils are challenged. You, your senior team and governors are aware that there is still some variability in the quality of teaching. This is particularly the case with the service your most able pupils receive. Your staff give extensive opportunities for pupils, including the most able, to write at length in English. However, during the inspection, I saw fewer opportunities for pupils, and particularly most-able pupils, to develop their analytical and technical skills by writing at length in other subjects such as religious education and geography.
- You and your staff know your pupils well. This is particularly the case with those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, these pupils make generally good progress from their starting points. You use the additional funding for these pupils well, focusing it precisely and monitoring its effect carefully to ensure that it is leading to the desired outcomes. Above all, as the leader of the school, you are determined to ensure that these pupils get the support they need. You move promptly to engage with external support services to make sure that these pupils succeed.
- You also use the additional funding you receive to support disadvantaged pupils well. You and your team carefully monitor the progress and well-being of your disadvantaged pupils. You use this knowledge to target support and remove, as far as you can, the barriers that get in the way. This includes the relatively poorer attendance of some of these pupils. You are clear that there is still more to do if the

differences in outcomes between disadvantaged pupils and others at the school are to dwindle and disappear.

- Your governors are also very clear about their role in ensuring that all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, do well. They are well led and understand what needs to be done to improve the school further. However, the governing body has only recently come up to full complement and the full induction of newer governors is not yet complete.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- any remaining inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning are removed and staff continue to share expertise to raise standards of teaching overall
- pupils, including the most able, continue to have more opportunities to write at length in subjects other than English
- they continue to bear down relentlessly on individual pupils' poor attendance
- newly and recently appointed governors are supported so that they quickly understand the issues that face the school and their roles in supporting leaders to address these issues.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Durham. 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 you, 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 5 and talked informally with pupils in lessons and around the school at lunch- and breaktimes. I watched a rehearsal of the school's 30-strong brass ensemble and I listened to a group of Year 2 pupils reading and discussing books.

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 early years, mathematics and literacy leaders, three governors, including the vice-chair of the governing body, and with the

coordinators of the school's work to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

I spoke with the chair of governors on the telephone. I also spoke on the telephone with an officer from Durham local authority 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 18 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View), 17 free-text comments from parents, 17 responses from staff and 35 responses from pupils to the online questionnaires.