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Mr R Morgan
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Dear Mr Morgan

Short inspection of Northcote Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 March 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 October 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Your broad range of leadership experience and detailed knowledge of education ensure that you, together with leaders and other staff, are making a strong contribution to the social, emotional and academic development of the pupils in your care. You say that the school is special because of the families that it serves. This ethos was evident on the day of the inspection in all aspects of provision. Your dedication to developing the practice of those around you is highly commendable. It has resulted in a school where staff are empowered to be leaders. Your local authority improvement partner and your governing body are justly proud of the contribution that you, and many other leaders in the school, are making to school improvement throughout Liverpool.

Your governing body is highly skilled, bringing a wealth of experience to support school improvement. Your chair of governors has dedicated many years to Northcote Primary School and has received national commendation for his contribution to leadership. His understated and modest approach to leadership is in keeping with the school's values and ethos that he holds so dear.

Almost all parents and carers who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, spoke very highly of the school, including the way in which it is led and managed. One parent, reflecting the view of the majority, noted: 'The school has a great management team, with approachable staff, always considering children's safety. They are really concerned about children's well-being and academic improvement.'

You are rightly proud of the rapid progress that pupils make from entry into the school. At the end of key stage 2, the progress of pupils in both mathematics and writing has been in the highest 20% of schools nationally for the last three years. This is in no small part due to the high quality of training and leadership development that you regularly provide for your staff. It also reflects your assertion that all pupils should be empowered to achieve and that a ceiling should never be placed on expectations or learning.

You were asked at the last inspection to improve the quality of teaching by sharing high-quality skills and strong practice. This has been addressed most successfully. Staff, working closely with leaders, have regular opportunities to share the good practice of others. Opportunities for staff to learn from good practice in other schools have also resulted in improvements in teaching. Additionally, many of your leaders use their considerable skills to support improvement in other schools. As a consequence, your detailed monitoring of performance shows that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment throughout school is of a consistently high standard.

You were also asked by inspectors to raise attainment in reading and writing at key stage 1. This was by developing the teaching of phonics and ensuring that pupils know and use basic skills in writing. Much progress has been made in this area. Writing is taught in an effective manner across the curriculum and evidence in books shows that pupils are able to successfully apply basic skills across the curriculum.

The teaching of phonics has been a big focus for leaders. Teachers check children's performance in phonics on entry to school. This ensures that they can plan with precision for their learning. Action plans are created to address individual needs and high-quality resources ensure that each child receives the best possible provision. As a consequence, since the last inspection, there has been a rapid increase in pupils' performance in the Year 1 phonic screening test and results are now broadly in line with those seen nationally. This indicates accelerated progress from pupils' starting points.

We discussed areas where further work is required to support school improvement. You are aware, from the school's most recent published performance information, that while much progress has been made in the good level of development that children achieve at the end of Reception Year, it is still below that seen nationally. This is also the case in reading and writing for pupils at the end of key stage 1. Additionally, while attainment is in line with and often above national averages for

pupils at the expected levels at the end of key stage 2, it is below national averages at the higher levels in reading and writing.

Safeguarding is effective.

You provide governors and staff with a broad range of training to ensure that they are able to keep pupils safe. This includes training in the 'Prevent' duty and in safer recruitment practices. Your school site is safe and secure. You ensure that signing-in procedures are thorough and you require all visitors to read and accept details about your safeguarding procedures on entry to the school.

Your safeguarding team is efficient and well informed. It works in a highly effective manner with other leaders to ensure that pupil safety is woven expertly through the curriculum. Pupils understand and value the opportunities you provide to raise their awareness of safe practices such as 'lock-down' procedures. They are proud to have been included in the decision-making process to agree these procedures in the event of such an emergency.

Inspection findings

- You work in a highly strategic manner with leaders and other staff to provide a curriculum that is well crafted, exciting and engaging. You have recently received the Artsmark award and the Reading Quality Mark, both at gold level. Additionally, a national award for science was received. In 2017, you were awarded the Inclusion Quality Mark and the Liverpool Counts Quality Mark at gold level as well as the Basic Skills Award. You ensure that the vast majority of pupils have the opportunity to play a musical instrument. Teachers are proud of the way in which effective links are made between subject areas. As a consequence of this learning, pupils make accelerated progress from their initial starting points, leaving school at the end of Year 6 with the skills required to undertake their secondary education with confidence and understanding.
- At the start of the inspection, I shared with you a number of lines of enquiry. We first considered the way in which reading is taught. Leaders are passionate about developing pupils' desire to read widely and often. As a consequence, they ensure that the school is literacy rich, with displays of books positioned around the building. Each classroom has a dedicated reading area with a good range of books to develop understanding across the curriculum. The school library is of the highest standard, sparking pupils' imaginations with high-quality displays, puppets, dressing-up clothes, a reading 'throne' and a broad range of fiction and information books for all ages. As a result of this focus, leaders have effectively cultivated a desire for reading in pupils and the school has been awarded a Reading Quality Mark at gold level for 'engagement in reading'.
- Leaders have undertaken a broad range of training on the teaching of reading and, as a consequence, have adapted and improved the way in which it is taught. This has had a positive impact on pupils. They speak with great enthusiasm about their love of reading and the range of reading skills that they have developed. While pupils make accelerated progress with their reading skills and have improved in terms of attainment, you are aware that leaders need to

further increase the attainment of pupils in reading at key stage 1 at the expected and higher levels. Additionally, at key stage 2, increased attainment is required at the higher levels to ensure that performance continues to improve to reflect the standards seen nationally.

- The next area examined was the effectiveness of leaders in reducing rates of absence throughout school. Attendance is a key focus for all leaders. You work effectively with outside agencies to offer appropriate support to families and have created a 'task team' to further address absence levels. This is made up of leaders, teachers and parents. A school walking bus runs each morning using a range of routes to encourage punctuality. Parents and pupils welcome this provision and numbers are continuing to increase. Additionally, pupils love the variety of rewards they receive for good attendance. One parent noted: 'The headteacher and the rest of the staff are doing a great job in instilling the values of regular attendance. The 100% rewards each term give my daughter something special to look forward to.' As a result of your focused efforts in this area, you now have an improving trend of attendance and recently received an Attendance Quality Mark for positive action taken in this area. Nevertheless, we agreed that attendance will remain a focus for leaders to ensure that rates continue to rise.
- My final line of enquiry concerned actions by leaders to increase the number of children who achieve a good level of development by the end of Reception Year. Children enter school with skills below those typical for their age. During the summer holidays, you provide a thorough induction programme for parents and children. This is to ensure that children are settled and ready to learn in September. You provide opportunities for teachers to undertake regular training and work with advisers from the local authority. This has enabled them to further improve provision for the children. Staff ensure that great emphasis is placed on developing pupils' speaking and listening skills. Learning is also planned around the children's own interests. As a consequence of this approach, you are able to provide a high standard of education for children in early years and you have seen great improvements year on year in the number of children who achieve a good level of development. However, due to many children's low performance on entry, you are aware that this focus will need to continue.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue to develop provision for speaking and listening to ensure that an increased number of children have the necessary skills to achieve a good level of development at the end of Reception Year
- further increase the attainment of pupils in reading and writing at key stage 1 at the expected and higher levels and at key stage 2 at the higher levels
- embed existing good practice to further raise levels of attendance.

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

Yours sincerely

Gill Pritchard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and the two deputy headteachers. I also met with governors, including the chair of the governing body. I spoke with the safeguarding leader and attendance leader. Additionally, I met with leaders for English and early years and spoke to your school's local authority improvement partner. I had a formal discussion with a group of 10 pupils and met with your bursar. I also spoke with a group of staff to discuss their views on safeguarding, staff training and curriculum development.

Accompanied by you, I visited all year groups except Year 5, who were on a visit. I observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and as they moved around the school. I scrutinised examples of pupils' work and reviewed documents, including your record of checks on the suitability of staff and volunteers to work with children, the school's self-evaluation, improvement plan, schemes of work linked to safeguarding and assessment information. I also took account of the 18 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, 35 responses from the staff survey and 81 responses to the pupil survey. I considered information posted on the school's website.