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Mrs Sarah Robson  
Head of School  
Morpeth Road Primary Academy  
Bates Avenue  
Blyth  
Northumberland  
NE24 5TQ

Dear Mrs Robson

### **Short inspection of Morpeth Road Primary Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 19 April 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 March 2015.

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.**

You and your team are working closely with trust colleagues to improve the quality of teaching and learning and to improve outcomes for pupils. You are working effectively with the newly appointed executive headteacher to lead improvement and provide stability at a period of change. The school is currently moving from the sponsorship of the Blyth Quays Trust to the Wise Academies Trust. Governors and trustees of the Blyth Quays Trust have gone to considerable lengths to secure a sponsor that shares the ethos and values of the school. The Wise Academies Trust is already investing significant support to develop leadership and improve teaching, providing significant capacity for further improvement.

Leaders at all levels have an accurate and honest picture of current performance. You and colleagues from both trusts have commissioned a series of reviews to use external scrutiny to refine improvement priorities. Leaders have a keen awareness of areas for improvement which they are prioritising appropriately. The subject leader for mathematics has reviewed staff subject knowledge and provided training to develop their expertise in the new mathematics curriculum. There are signs these approaches are leading to improving outcomes for pupils, particularly at the end of key stage 2. In addition, you have reviewed practice in the early years to provide children with a stronger foundation in literacy and numeracy. Even though pupils' outcomes in phonics have shown ongoing improvement in recent years, you have

nevertheless reviewed teaching to further develop pupils' reading and writing skills. Together with the Wise Academy Trust's director of teaching and learning, you are implementing broader strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning, while recognising that these are likely to take longer to come into effect.

In recent years, pupils' progress has been variable. In 2017, pupils made good progress in reading and much improved progress in writing at the end of key stage 2. However, pupils' progress in mathematics was much weaker. In addition, pupils made much weaker progress at key stage 1. In contrast, outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check have shown a significant improvement. While the proportion of children achieving a good level of development increased in the early years, it remained below that seen nationally. Current progress for pupils at key stage 2 is improving but the picture at key stage 1 remains much more variable.

At the last inspection, leaders were advised to improve the quality of teaching in order to raise standards further. In particular, leaders were asked to improve provision at key stage 1, in mathematics and for the most able pupils. These improvements did not take place rapidly enough and in some cases outcomes in mathematics and at key stage 1 declined. In addition, too few pupils have been able to work at greater depths of understanding. You and your team recognise this and are now working with renewed purpose to ensure that pupils make stronger progress.

Stronger systems have been introduced to increase accountability at all levels and these are intensifying under the current leadership restructure. Subject leaders have had opportunities to work with colleagues in high-performing schools in similar contexts. This has helped teachers to develop a more accurate view of standards and has raised their expectations of what pupils can achieve. Middle leaders have been given increased responsibility to lead improvement, although they are not as experienced in measuring the impact of improvement strategies. Your team has accepted that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has lacked consistency. Since September, colleagues have introduced 'challenge' tasks to raise expectations. More recently, new approaches are enabling teachers to assess pupils' understanding more swiftly. As a result, teachers are beginning to pitch work more accurately to meet pupils' needs.

You and the leadership team are managing the process of change effectively. In meetings and in responses to questionnaires, there is clear evidence that you have sustained staff morale and developed a shared commitment to improvement. Staff now have higher expectations and are working purposefully to improve the quality of teaching to improve pupils' outcomes.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders make thorough checks on the suitability of adults working at the school. They ensure that staff and governors receive up-to-date training on safeguarding issues. Leaders commission external reviews of safeguarding practice

to check that policies and procedures meet requirements. These reviews frequently commend school leaders for their work in this area. Leaders pursue concerns over pupils' safety vigorously and record them thoroughly. On occasion, some records do not fully capture the actions that leaders have taken.

The 'family' team has developed strong links with families and external agencies to promote pupils' safety and welfare. There is clear evidence that the safety and welfare of pupils has been enhanced as a result of the actions staff have taken. Staff provide additional help for pupils' social and emotional needs through specific nurture groups and a range of other support. In meetings, pupils said they feel safe in school and the vast majority of their parents agree. Pupils believe that bullying is rare and teachers are good at resolving any instances of bullying. Pupils showed an awareness of how to stay safe online and on the roads.

### **Inspection findings**

- Senior leaders and subject leaders have introduced a range of strategies to improve pupils' progress in mathematics. The subject leader has completed an audit of staff subject knowledge. She has worked with colleagues from high-performing schools to gain insight into the use of resources and methods to improve the quality of teaching. As a result of this stronger focus, a much higher proportion of Year 6 pupils is on course to reach the expected standards in 2018. However, developments are at an early stage and much more needs to be done to enable pupils to work at greater depths of understanding.
- You and the executive headteacher are aware that the quality of teaching varies across the school. This has contributed to variable outcomes and some weaker progress for pupils, particularly at key stage 1. New leadership structures are being implemented to heighten accountability for pupils' outcomes across all key stages. In addition, new teaching strategies are helping teachers to check pupils' understanding and to pitch work more appropriately to meet their needs. Stronger processes are in place, although their implementation is at an early stage.
- The 'family' team is working intensively to improve pupils' attendance. They have faced more challenging demands in recent years. The team track attendance regularly and intervene swiftly when attendance declines. Individual case studies show that leaders have had a marked effect in improving the attendance of individual pupils. Leaders are balancing support for families with the more recent use of deterrents, such as fixed-penalty notices. Leaders are working strenuously to improve attendance but absence rates are still not declining rapidly enough.
- Leaders recognise that outcomes for disadvantaged pupils have been too variable. They commissioned an external review of the use of pupil premium in November 2017. Teachers are now more accountable for the progress of disadvantaged pupils. In 2017, disadvantaged pupils made good progress in reading but much weaker progress in mathematics. Current progress information shows that disadvantaged pupils are making better progress in Year 6, with a much higher proportion on course to achieve expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics. However, differences in attainment and attendance

remain in other year groups.

- You have worked with the early years leaders from the Wise Academies Trust to review assessment, the learning environment and the teaching of literacy and numeracy skills. The team has a clear vision to give children a thorough grounding in key literacy and numeracy skills. These actions are contributing to improving teaching, although some inconsistencies persist. Leaders' actions are contributing to improving progress, with an increasing proportion of children on course to achieve a good level of development in 2018.
- Teaching has supported pupils in making good progress in reading as they progress through the school. For two consecutive years, pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, have made above average progress in reading. Outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check have shown significant improvement in recent years. Teachers are currently refining their practice to further enhance progress in reading and to develop pupils' vocabulary.
- The family team carries out considerable work to address the social and emotional needs of children and families. They maintain a consistent focus on pupils' well-being and work closely with families and external agencies to address emotional needs and remove barriers to learning.
- Pupils, parents and carers greatly value the additional experiences the school provides to widen pupils' horizons. Pupils acquire specialist knowledge by working with teachers at local secondary schools and colleges. Pupils talked enthusiastically about residential experiences in the Lake District and opportunities to build their own go-kart. These experiences and the wider curricular provision develop pupils' self-confidence and their social skills.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- improve the quality of teaching to enable pupils to make good progress in English and mathematics across all year groups, and particularly at key stage 1
- improve the progress disadvantaged pupils make through more focused teaching and by closely checking the effect of new initiatives and the use of additional funding
- intensify the implementation of approaches to secure improving rates of attendance for all pupils and particular groups of pupils
- develop the roles of middle leaders to heighten their accountability for pupils' progress and to enable them to measure the effectiveness of improvement strategies
- accelerate actions to improve the quality of teaching in the early years, and particularly in key stage 1, in order to overcome barriers to learning at the earliest opportunity.

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

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Kirtley  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

As part of the inspection, I explored the actions taken by leaders to improve pupils' outcomes at key stage 1, with a particular focus upon mathematics across all key stages. I also looked at the actions leaders were taking to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and to raise overall rates of attendance. I also explored the impact of new developments to improve provision in the early years.

During the inspection, I met with you and the newly appointed executive headteacher from the Wise Academies Trust. I also met senior and middle leaders. I spoke with three members of the governing board and the chair of the Blyth Quays Trust. I also held a telephone conversation with the school improvement partner. I looked with you at learning in lessons. I looked at pupils' work in books and folders. I examined the school improvement plan as well as other documents, including the school's self-evaluation, behaviour and attendance records and assessment information. I examined safeguarding documents, including the single central record. I took into account 14 responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire and seven free-text responses from parents. I also took into account 45 responses to the staff questionnaire.