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Mrs Caroline Elsey
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Elsey

Short inspection of West Woodburn First School

Following my visit to the school on 28 March 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 December 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. There have been significant changes in the leadership and management of the school. You, your head of school and the chair of the governing body have been appointed this academic year. A further three new governors have recently joined the governing body. You all work well together, holding pupils at the centre of your endeavours.

Since taking up post in September 2016, you have worked diligently to strengthen links with the local, rural community, within whose heart this small school lies. You have created an inclusive, welcoming ethos; staff morale is high. Pupils' attendance is good and no groups are hindered by regular absence. Parents say that their children 'rush' to get to school each morning because they are happy, well looked after and enjoy all that the school has to offer 'academically and socially'. Pupils agree enthusiastically, saying that they feel safe because they are with 'people you know you can trust'. According to pupils, 'everyone is friendly' and there is no bullying. Pupils and their parents would recommend the school to others without hesitation.

In your capacity as executive headteacher, you share your time between West Woodburn and another three Northumberland schools. You recognise the benefits and potential challenges that this arrangement presents. You work closely with the head of school to ensure that good-quality leadership continues while you are off-site. Together, you monitor the quality of teaching and learning, offering feedback

to teaching staff to support their professional development. You have a comprehensive knowledge of each pupil as a learner and also the skills of the adults working with them. You are wholly committed to empowering and developing all staff, making sure that good-quality professional development opportunities are readily available. You have correctly identified that the use and performance of teaching assistants needs further scrutiny to ensure that they are always deployed in the best possible manner to support and challenge pupils in their learning. This means continuing to appraise adults' skills rigorously and utilising those precious minutes across a school day with an ever-critical eye.

Your chair of governors has been busy. She has established weekly challenge and support meetings with you and/or your head of school, getting to know for herself what provision is like for pupils and checking that leaders' priorities are the right ones. The chair of governors commissioned a skills audit to ensure that appropriate knowledge and understanding underpin governors' actions. Following this work, a commitment to further improvement is evident; governors have embarked on suitable training where needs were identified. New governors bring the required breadth of skills needed to enhance the governing body's expertise. The local authority's governors and clerking services have been instrumental in this quest to improve governance. You are mindful that newer governors will continue to need further support to fulfil their roles and statutory duties with increasing effectiveness.

The previous inspection report challenged the school to improve pupils' outcomes in mathematics. Cohorts are very small, typically fewer than five pupils. This reduces the helpfulness of drawing comparisons between pupils' outcomes and national averages. In 2016, all pupils achieved the expected standard in mathematics in Year 2. You correctly identified, however, that from their typical or above-typical starting points, too few pupils reached a greater depth of learning in mathematics and other subjects. As a result, you have striven to raise adults' expectations of what pupils can do and achieve. Your actions are bearing fruit. Currently, a greater proportion of pupils in each year group are making good progress and tackling greater depths of learning in reading and writing, as well as in mathematics. You recognise that further work is needed to embed and build upon this positive position. Your clearly communicated and, therefore, shared intention is to ensure that the most able pupils, including those in Reception, reach the highest standards of which they are capable across all subjects, consistently.

Teaching and learning is good. Teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge, articulating sounds and letters precisely and explaining new vocabulary and concepts to pupils, carefully. This means that younger pupils apply their phonics skills effectively to tackle unfamiliar vocabulary. Teachers read regularly with and to pupils, asking searching questions about texts to build pupils' skills of inference and deduction. All pupils expressed an interest and enjoyment in reading for pleasure; they are especially grateful for the wealth of new reading materials that you have purchased to engage and excite their interests. Looking closely at pupils' work together, we agreed that some pupils have too few opportunities to write at length independently. Occasionally, therefore, it is tricky for you to identify precisely the extent and rate of an individual pupil's progress in writing.

Safeguarding is effective.

You place a strong emphasis on protecting pupils and keeping them safe. Safeguarding arrangements are fitting, systems are effective and, due to your implementation of revised methods, records are now well maintained. Staff and governors receive regular training to make sure that they are up to date with the most recent national legislation and guidance. Adults talk knowledgeably about the need to be vigilant and alert to the signs that indicate that a pupil may be at risk of harm. An 'it could happen here' attitude is, rightfully, present among staff and governors.

Pupils say that they 'definitely' feel safe. Parents agree. Teaching staff develop pupils' knowledge and understanding, talking with them regularly about the importance of healthy lifestyles, nutritious food and keeping fit. Pupils talk confidently about managing risks associated with using the internet, roads and fire. Fire drills take place regularly but at irregular times, to ensure that pupils and staff know how to evacuate the school building promptly and safely. Adults also listen carefully to pupils and are sensitive to their needs. This means that pupils feel cared for and protected. Respect is reciprocal; pupils' good behaviour and happy demeanour demonstrate this overtly.

Pupils' rates of attendance are good over time, overall. In 2016, however, there was a dip in girls' attendance. Girls were more likely than other pupils nationally to be regularly absent from school. You have worked collaboratively with parents and pupils this year to remedy issues that you jointly identified. The attendance of girls currently is in line with others nationally. This improvement means that there are now no groups of pupils hampered by poor attendance.

Inspection findings

- You are ambitious for all pupils. You and governors were disappointed with the proportions of pupils reaching greater depths of learning in English and mathematics in Year 2 in 2016. You have, therefore, communicated heightened expectations of what pupils can do and achieve among staff, parents and pupils themselves. The school's own assessment information and pupils' work demonstrate that pupils are on track to reach the more challenging targets that you have set in reading, writing and mathematics. You have, however, correctly identified that teaching is not consistently empowering the most able pupils, including those in Reception, to reach the highest standards in all subjects.
- Pupils behave well. Their conduct in and around the school is good and their attitudes to learning are positive. Pupils' understanding of British values is developing well; older pupils explain sophisticated concepts such as democracy and liberty knowledgeably. Respect and tolerance for others are well embedded. In discussing faiths and lifestyles, one pupil's viewpoint sparked healthy debate: 'You should be free to make your own choices.' Play outside is energetic, cheerful and well supervised by adults. Older pupils include younger children in their games, looking after them and making sure that no one feels left out or gets hurt.

- You have tweaked the curriculum. Pupils are interested and excited by the alterations that you and staff have implemented. You revamped homework, for example. The half-termly 'homework grids' that allow pupils an element of choice based on their individual needs and interests are a favourite with parents as well as pupils. Innovative ideas with a competitive edge like this are creating a real sense of fun about learning, meaning that pupils want to do their very best to impress and succeed.
- In your role of special educational needs coordinator you make sure that the small pot of special educational funding is spent wisely. Consequently, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their different starting points. You and your head of school have made sure that detailed plans are in place to support this group. Pupils' progress is monitored each half term. This allows any slippage to be quickly spotted and further actions or resources put in place to enable pupils to catch up quickly. Plans are afoot to employ a part-time special educational needs coordinator to free up a little more of your valuable time for your wider leadership duties.
- There are very few and, at times, no pupils in the school who are eligible for the pupil premium funding. However, on those occasions where additional money is made available to the school, you and governors consider carefully how best to improve outcomes for eligible pupils. Additional teaching assistant hours and bespoke spending plans have been instrumental in ensuring that disadvantaged pupils make good progress from their starting points over time.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- new governors are fully equipped with the skills, knowledge and understanding needed to fulfil their core function
- additional adults are deployed effectively to focus upon pupils' learning during lessons
- teaching consistently allows the most able pupils, including those in the Reception Year, to reach a greater depth of learning across subjects
- pupils are regularly challenged to practise and apply their skills in writing at length, independently.

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

Fiona Manuel
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your head of school. I also met with a group of pupils and the chair of the governing body. I spoke with parents at the school gate and took account of 13 free-text opinions as well as 14 parental responses on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I talked with pupils informally during breaks and in lessons and considered the six staff responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. Five pupils responded to the pupil survey. I held a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. I examined pupils' work, observed teaching and learning in all classes and evaluated recent information about the progress of pupils. I studied a wide range of documentation, including the school's improvement plans and records regarding behaviour and safety. During this inspection, I paid particular attention to the teaching and learning of phonics, the quality of English teaching in key stage 1, challenge for the most able pupils, leaders' use of the pupil premium funding for disadvantaged pupils and pupils' attendance.