

22 February 2018

Mrs Lynda Woodburn
Headteacher
Dalton St Mary's CofE Primary School
Coronation Drive
Dalton-in-Furness
Cumbria
LA15 8QR

Dear Mrs Woodburn

Short inspection of Dalton St Mary's CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 8 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 May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your staff continue to provide a harmonious learning community where parents believe their children 'make great progress both academically and socially'.

You and your deputy headteacher have an accurate and reflective view of the school's strengths and priorities. You are determined to improve the school further and have high expectations of what you and your staff can achieve. Governors provide a balance of support and challenge. Together, you have invested in mobile technology to improve many aspects of the school's work. As a result, you are the only regional training centre in Cumbria, sharing best practice about how technology can be used in the classroom to support pupils' learning.

As a local leader of education, you support other headteachers while your senior leaders develop the skills of leaders in other schools in the areas of information technology and mathematics and in measuring the impact of the use of pupil premium funding.

At the previous inspection in 2013, inspectors asked the leadership team, including governors, to improve the quality of teaching. Leaders ensure the quality of teaching is usually never less than good and is often better. You provide teachers with many opportunities to share best practice both across and beyond the school. You and the senior leadership team lead by example and provide a raft of support for your staff team. Teaching is now consistently good across subjects and stages.

You were also given the task of raising expectations and challenge for the most able in mathematics and tackling inconsistencies in teaching mathematics. Since the previous inspection, you have appointed a new leader of mathematics, who introduced a new whole-school approach to teaching mathematics from January 2017. This is proving to be effective, and teachers carefully plan activities for the range of abilities in their class. Teachers now provide more challenge for pupils through focused problem-solving activities and opportunities for pupils to explain why an answer may be right or wrong. Leaders have analysed the dip in the proportion of girls achieving the expected and higher standard in mathematics, which was cohort-specific in 2017. Work in pupils' books demonstrates that girls currently in key stage 2 are progressing as well as boys. In many aspects of mathematics, challenge is more evident and the focus is now on developing reasoning skills so that even more pupils reach the higher standard by the end of Year 6. In 2017, the proportion reaching the expected and higher standards in mathematics was slightly lower than the national average but current work in books and pupils' progress show an improving picture.

Inspectors also asked you to provide more challenge for the most able pupils in reading and writing. Teachers provide more opportunities for pupils to talk about their writing and use role play to act out stories before they embark on writing. 'Dalton St Mary's Reading Army' of volunteer parents, grandparents, rugby players and sports coaches is also having an impact on moving pupils on with their reading skills more quickly. Pupils' writing in English and across a range of subjects reflects the 2017 test results, when the proportion of pupils reaching the higher standards was significantly higher than that seen nationally. The proportion reaching the higher standard in reading was slightly lower than the national average. Your prompt response to give more attention to pupils' comprehension skills is already showing these skills are improving.

You were also asked to review ways in which pupils know how to improve their work. Teachers and teaching assistants now provide instant feedback in lessons and, through mobile technology, promote a dialogue about how pupils can improve their work. Pupils have a good understanding of how to edit their own and each other's work.

You and your staff continue to ensure that children get off to a good start in the early years. Parents told me how happily their children have settled into Nursery and Reception classes. Staff ensure thorough transition arrangements into the school which help pupils to settle quickly into their learning.

Overall, progress is good and, in 2017, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard was above the national average in reading and well above the national average in writing. Pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics was slightly lower than the national average but overall pupils make good progress. Due to the good quality of teaching and the nurturing school community, pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their education by the time they leave school.

Safeguarding is effective.

In your role as the designated safeguarding leader, and together with your three deputy designated safeguarding leaders, you work tirelessly to ensure that all safeguarding arrangements meet requirements. You make sure that staff fully understand their duties and follow systems and procedures for logging concerns. Together with the office manager, you ensure that all necessary checks are made on the suitability of staff to work with children.

You ensure that the promotion of safeguarding throughout the school has a very high profile. You provide staff with training that is up to date so that they and members of the local governing committee understand the current guidance. You and the deputy designated safeguarding leaders are prompt in making referrals to the local authority. Together, you rigorously follow up all concerns raised by staff and make sure pupils are kept safe from potential harm. You work with a wide range of external agencies to provide expertise to support pupils' welfare as and when necessary. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of a high quality.

Inspection findings

- As part of this inspection, I investigated how well the provision in early years is enabling children to develop a love of learning. You and your staff continue to ensure that children get off to a good start in early years. It was impressive to see so many parents settle to read with their children at the start of the school day. This is developing children's love of books and stories and provides a really calm start to the day. Children choose from a wide range of activities to enhance their learning through a balance of opportunities to explore on their own as well as learning supported by adults. Staff plan activities to develop speaking and listening skills in the outdoor area in the early years classroom. For example, a group of children in the Reception class used role play to act out the story which had previously been read to the whole class. Staff effectively encourage this type of activity to develop pupils' writing skills. Although the proportion reaching a good level of development by the time they leave the Reception class was lower than that nationally for the last two years, children make good progress from their individual starting points. Leaders are focused on ensuring that more pupils reach a good level of development by the time they leave the Reception class.
- I also focused on the quality of the teaching of phonics. Teachers and teaching assistants throughout early years and key stage 1 ensure that there is a systematic approach to the teaching of phonics. This is having a positive impact on current pupils' performance and their start in the Nursery. Children were seen learning the 'h' sound. Teachers use a variety of approaches that encourage the children to repeat sounds, draw letters and sing the letter sounds, which makes learning enjoyable. Skilled teaching assistants and teachers provide bespoke interventions for pupils who begin to fall behind. In Year 2, the teaching assistant used effective questioning to develop comprehension skills and pupils used their understanding of letters and their sounds well to work out unfamiliar words. Leaders have improved the quantity and quality of books available in the library,

classrooms and for reading at home. Your staff work closely with parents and this increases opportunities for pupils to extend their learning beyond school and is having an impact on the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standards by the end of Year 1.

- Finally, I explored how well leaders monitor the quality of teaching and learning, including the impact of mobile technology on learning and assessment. Leaders frequently check that teachers' planning is effective. Through their observations, learning walks and scrutiny of pupils' books, leaders have placed a greater emphasis on developing pupils' reasoning skills in mathematics. You ensure that teachers and teaching assistants are provided with high-quality training and coaching so that staff work as a cohesive team with pupils at the heart of all they do. Your senior leadership team is pioneering the use of mobile technology in many aspects of school life. Teachers swiftly provide information to pupils on how well they can improve their work using technology, and an online conversation between pupils and teachers is evident. Parents commented on mobile technology being 'a really useful tool ... I can log into my child's account and see their work instantly'.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- a greater proportion reach the higher standards in mathematics by extending pupils' reasoning skills in mathematics
- teachers build on good progress so that even more children reach a good level of development by the time they leave the Reception class.

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

Yours sincerely

Naomi Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I observed teaching and learning alongside the headteacher. I held meetings with senior leaders, subject leaders, members of the governing body, the designated safeguarding leader and the deputy designated safeguarding leader. I evaluated the 28 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I spoke informally with parents at the school gates to seek their views. I also took account of 28 free-text responses from parents. I held a meeting with pupils and also spoke informally with pupils during breaks and in lessons. In addition, I took account of the 142 responses to the Ofsted pupils' survey. I reviewed the 14 responses to the Ofsted staff survey. During the inspection, I reviewed a range of school documents. These included: the school's development plans and self-evaluation documents; minutes of the governing body meetings; safeguarding documentation and records relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance.