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26 February 2018

Mrs Claire Little
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Little

Short inspection of Caldew Lea School

Following my visit to the school on 30 January 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 December 2012.

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.

After taking up your post as headteacher in September 2017, you evaluated the quality of education and care being provided at Caldew Lea as requiring improvement. Your findings are based on a broad range of evidence including observing the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, work in pupils' books and the progress pupils make in every class and year group. You have an accurate understanding of the strengths within the school and areas for development. As a result, you and your senior leadership team have implemented several changes to swiftly drive whole-school improvements. You have correctly focused your attention on enhancing pupils' skills in reading, writing and mathematics in bespoke lessons and across the wider curriculum.

You have restructured the leadership team and subject leader responsibilities and recognise that to develop their areas of responsibility, further training and support are needed for some leaders. You have instigated support from the local authority during this period of change. Governors are exceptionally supportive of staff and pupils and want the best for the school community. Governors told me that they need to develop their skills to provide more challenge to senior leaders and develop methods for monitoring and evaluating the impact of actions taken by leaders. The local authority is supporting this process.

At the previous inspection in 2012 inspectors asked the leaders and managers, including governors, to improve the quality of teaching by providing more practical opportunities and problem-solving activities in lessons. You have ensured that teachers prioritise even more opportunities for learning through investigation, leading to significant changes in how mathematics, English and the wider curriculum are now taught. Staff want the very best for pupils and are aware that these changes now need to be embedded to raise standards across the school.

You have instigated opportunities for teachers and leaders to see best practice beyond your own school in order to drive improvement further. You and senior leaders introduced a new marking policy in the autumn term so that pupils now have more clarity about how to improve their work.

Inspectors also asked that leaders work more closely with parents and carers so that they understand how mathematics and English are taught. You and the governors provided me with evidence of workshops that have been organised for parents but attendance at such events remains low. The leadership team continues to explore opportunities for family learning and to improve the attendance of pupils who have too many absences.

Staff ensure that children get off to a good start in the early years. Year on year, the proportion reaching a good level of development has risen and is now closer to the national average. However, by the time pupils leave Year 6, the proportion reaching the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics is smaller than that seen nationally. Although overall good progress was made across key stage 2 in 2017, you and the leadership team are initiating changes to ensure consistently good progress across all year groups and subjects.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and told me how much they appreciate the range of opportunities to go on trips beyond school. During the inspection, Year 2 pupils were very excited to be visiting a wildlife park, a trip that was aimed at bringing their topic on Africa to life. Several pupils told me how much they enjoy singing in the choir and taking part in competitions.

Parents told me they value the school's 'family feel' and how much staff 'really care about their children'. The vast majority who spoke to me at the start of the school day and who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online parent questionnaire, said that the school strongly promotes learning. However, some parents felt that communication between school and home could be better by having more notice of events.

Safeguarding is effective.

In your role as the designated safeguarding leader, and together with your deputy designated safeguarding leader, you ensure that all safeguarding arrangements meet requirements. You have introduced changes to ensure pupils are safe and secure on the school premises. You make sure that staff fully understand their duty and follow systems and procedures for logging concerns using a new online system

introduced at the start of this term. Together with your school administrator, you ensure that all necessary checks are made on the suitability of staff to work with children.

You give safeguarding a high profile throughout the school. You provide staff with training that is up to date so that they and members of the governing body understand the current guidance. You, and the deputy designated safeguarding leader, 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 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

- My first line of enquiry was to check on the quality of the teaching of phonics. The proportion of Year 1 pupils achieving the required standard in the phonics check in the last three years was lower than the national average and significantly so in 2016. You and leaders of English are aware of more than one phonics programme being used in school which may slow pupils' progress. Leaders have not provided teachers and teaching assistants with recent training. Together, we observed that when staff do not plan phonics sessions to a high enough standard to challenge and engage all pupils, progress is too slow. Leaders of English understand the urgent need to develop their skills in monitoring more closely the quality of teaching, learning and assessment of phonics and how well this is being linked to writing, particularly in key stage 1.
- Secondly, I explored how subject leaders are driving improvements in their areas of responsibility. The subject leader for mathematics has introduced new approaches to the teaching of mathematics. A positive effect is clearly evident in her class. Here, the pupils have developed their recall of mathematical knowledge and the accuracy of its application. This has supported pupils' reasoning and problem-solving, which they are doing with increasing confidence. This has not spread to the rest of the school. Foundation subject leaders told me that they are at an early stage of driving improvements in their subject areas and still developing their skills in monitoring the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- I also considered how effectively the pupil premium and sports funding is used and monitored to drive improvement and raise standards. You have reviewed how these funds were spent in recent years and, together with the senior leadership team, made significant changes. During this academic year, two external sports coaches are working with all classes to broaden pupils' and teachers' experience of sports such as archery and dodgeball. It is too early to see the impact on pupils' overall learning. You and governors ensure that pupil premium funding is used for academic, social and emotional support of disadvantaged pupils. As a result, disadvantaged pupils' progress, including for those of higher ability, is now closer to that of other pupils. Governors recognise that they need to hone their skills to improve their monitoring of the

effectiveness of the use of these and other funds to improve the outcomes for pupils.

- Finally, I explored the high rates of absence in 2016 of disadvantaged pupils. You provided me with evidence to demonstrate how you, the newly appointed pastoral support worker and the office administrator are taking action to improve attendance. You follow up in detail those pupils who are late, occasionally absent or persistently absent. Leaders have recently introduced a new rewards scheme for whole-class attendance. However, there remain a significant proportion of parents who repeatedly take their children on holiday in term time or whose children are persistently absent for other reasons. This adversely affects attendance and interrupts pupils' learning.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- one phonics programme is used consistently to teach reading and that staff have regular opportunities to improve their teaching of phonics and link this to improving pupils' writing
- all subject leaders have the training and skills to drive improvement in their areas of responsibility
- governors develop their skills to provide appropriate challenge at a strategic level to ensure rapid whole-school improvement
- they work effectively with parents to improve the attendance of pupils who have too many absences.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, 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 and the designated safeguarding leader. I analysed 27 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and I spoke informally with parents at the school gates to seek their views. I also took account of 27 free-text responses from parents. I held a meeting with pupils and also spoke informally with pupils during breaks and in lessons. I reviewed the 26 responses to the Ofsted pupils' survey and the nine 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.