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Ms Rebecca Stacey
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Stacey

Short inspection of Castle Carrock School

Following my visit to the school on 25 September 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 June 2014.

You joined the school after the previous inspection and some other teachers are also new to the school.

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 focus successfully on making sure that the school continues to be a happy, welcoming community. You make links with other local schools and seek opportunities to enhance teaching and learning at Castle Carrock. You have a clear understanding of what the school does well and where it needs to improve further.

Parents say they are pleased that pupils take part in several competitive sports, for example netball. Pupils enjoy a variety of extra-curricular clubs and girls said how much they learn from the computer coding club.

Leaders and staff give pupils many worthwhile opportunities to contribute to the successful running of the school. A good example is the way that pupils support one another on the playground and give awards for positive behaviour.

Leaders and staff discuss national and local news with pupils. They considered the success of different communities in Cumbria in coping with recent, serious flooding.

Pupils told me how much they learn about the wider world. For example, pupils told me about 15-year-old Malala Yousafzai, who was shot in Pakistan for speaking in support of education for women. Through a wide range of school activities, pupils learn important values such as respect and charity.

Leaders and staff celebrate pupils' work in many attractive displays in classrooms and corridors. Staff set out attractive and fascinating fiction and non-fiction books around the school, such as those about the history of art, and pupils use them often. It is common to see pupils enjoying the use of computers as part of their learning.

Governors are enthusiastic and committed to helping the school to improve. They talk to pupils, staff and parents and observe some activities. However, they do not hold enough understanding of pupils' learning in different subjects. Consequently, they do not always review the achievement of pupils with enough rigour.

At the previous inspection, the inspector recommended that teachers ensure that pupils are clear about what staff expect them to learn from the activities they complete. This has been achieved. Staff now make certain that pupils understand the purpose of planned activities.

In some activities, pupils are inspired by their learning. For example, because of a recent history topic about the ancient Egyptians, key stage 2 pupils were able to talk to me with passion and understanding about building pyramids. They expressed their fascination with the way that people's intestines and other organs were mummified in canopic jars.

In the early years, children make a strong start to their education because of the skilful support from staff. They are becoming confident, skilled readers, writers and mathematicians. However, in mathematics in key stages 1 and 2, some activities do not challenge pupils enough and their learning slows as a result. The proportion of pupils who meet and exceed expectations for their age in mathematics is below the national average.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders are well informed about government guidelines for keeping pupils safe and the local safeguarding risks to families. They ensure that the school's child-protection arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders keep staff fully up to date regarding their responsibilities and train them to be vigilant for any signs that pupils may be at risk of harm. Leaders link with wider professionals whenever necessary. Governors take their safeguarding responsibilities seriously. For example, they recently considered the important question of 'what if...?' to help them check if the school protects pupils properly. Parents, pupils and staff said that they are confident that the school does all it can to keep pupils safe. Pupils with whom I spoke said that they feel able to voice any concerns they have about their lives, and that staff will listen and respond. Leaders ensure that staff teach pupils regularly about staying safe. Special events at school give extra focus to aspects of safeguarding,

including visits from a national safeguarding charity. Pupils show a clear understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including when they communicate with others through social media and the internet.

Inspection findings

- Staff give pupils helpful opportunities to practise using their number skills. As a result, pupils showed ready knowledge of key number facts. However, some pupils do not achieve well in mathematics. This is because the quality of pupils' learning in mathematics activities varies. Some pupils complete work that does not give them enough challenge, for example to debate and to solve problems. Leaders have a good understanding of the main weaknesses in teaching and pupils' learning in mathematics. They are beginning to address the most important issues. However, it is too soon to see the impact of recent changes to teaching and learning.
- Pupils enjoy school. They are clear about the purpose of activities set by teachers. Pupils show a consistently positive attitude towards learning. Their eagerness to learn and to achieve starts in the early years at the school. Staff organise the joint nursery/reception classroom and outdoor area well. They enthuse children about learning. They have high expectations of what children can achieve. For example, staff skilfully used a 100-square to help children learn about numbers larger than 20. Staff teach children to write in meaningful ways, such as about why they might go to the doctor's. They give children many opportunities to develop their communication and language skills. Parents said their children make a smooth start in the early years class when first joining the school.
- Leaders have maintained the school's strong provision for pupils' moral, cultural and social development, identified at the previous inspection. They ensure that staff plan the curriculum well to foster British values and to help pupils learn about the wider world. Pupils are proud of their fundraising, for example to help people diagnosed with cancer and to support people who are homeless. They know about the lives of famous Black people such as Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King. They have a good understanding of racism and why it is unacceptable. Pupils know about the achievements of different women in modern life, including the youngest ever commercial airline pilot who spoke with them recently. Pupils know how people who are disabled can overcome challenges and succeed.
- Governors visit the school regularly. They know the main strengths and weaknesses of the school. They debate and question what leaders tell them about the quality of pupils' education. They keep a close check on the school's finances. Recent changes in the membership of the governing body have brought a wider range of expertise. However, governors do not have a comprehensive understanding of pupils' achievement in different subjects. This means that they cannot challenge leaders about the work of the school in as much depth as they might.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all pupils learn well in mathematics so that they attain and increasingly exceed expectations for their age
- governors have a comprehensive understanding of pupils' achievement in different subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Tim Vaughan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and talked with staff. I spoke with parents as they dropped their children at school. I met with a sample of seven pupils from key stage 2. I held a meeting with the chair of governors and four other governors. I visited each classroom and observed pupils' learning. I considered school information about pupils' achievements and considered a range of documents, including your plans for improvement. With the school administrator, I reviewed school records of checks on the suitability of staff and governors to work with pupils.