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10 October 2018

Mrs Sue Gaston
Executive Head
Longtown Community Primary School
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Dear Mrs Gaston

Short inspection of Longtown Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 26 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.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You know the school very well. Together with the assistant headteacher, you accurately assess the school's effectiveness and know what it does well and what could be even better. You use this information to put astute plans in place for improvement. As a result, the school has improved since the last inspection.

There is a welcoming atmosphere in this small school, which sits at the heart of the community. Pupils appreciate the warm relationships and say that everyone knows each other. 'It is like one big family,' one pupil said to me. Pupils are happy to come to school and they feel proud of their school. They work well with each other and many of the learning activities are collaborative. Staff care deeply about the well-being of pupils and pupils and their families are well known to staff. Many parents said how supportive and adaptable the school is to ensure it meets each child's individual need. One parent said: 'This personal approach and the positive nurturing environment the staff create make Longtown an exceptional school.'

Leaders are acutely aware of the need to ensure that pupils in this small rural school are well prepared for the wider world and have opportunities to engage with a more diverse population. Pupils are inspired by the trips they undertake, including one to a city. They have enjoyed visiting a variety of places of worship. They also appreciate the opportunities they are given to meet with and work with pupils from a school in Walsall. This area of the school's work has improved since the last inspection.

Governance of the school is strategic and strong. Governors have a range of relevant skills and experience to effectively support the work of the school. They are well informed by senior leaders and are kept up to date with the strengths and development areas within the school. Where necessary, they do provide challenge. Governors took the decision to enter into a service level agreement with the high school in order to increase leadership capacity. This has been extremely beneficial. Under your guidance, the assistant headteacher is an insightful leader with a clear sense of purpose and direction and you work together highly effectively as a team.

An area for improvement at the last inspection was to raise teachers' expectations of what pupils could achieve, particularly the most able. You have made this a focus of your professional development programme and have worked with teachers to improve their level of questioning, so that pupils are faced with open-ended questions and are expected to explain and justify their answers to move learning on. You have also ensured that pupils are set work, particularly in mathematics, which extends their thinking and challenges them to achieve the standards of which they are capable.

Since the last inspection you have also ensured that teachers have more opportunities to observe outstanding teaching and consider what makes effective teaching and learning. Although there have been changes of staff in this time, the quality of teaching and learning has improved as a consequence of the support and guidance that they have received. Staff development is a priority for you, governors and the assistant headteacher. Teachers who are relatively new to teaching accept advice and act upon it quickly. Staff morale is high and their commitment to do everything they can for the benefit of the pupils is apparent. Pupils are engaged and focused in lessons and this makes a large contribution to their effective learning. It is a school where 'everyone strives to be their very best'.

Pupils are now being given more opportunities to refine the skills they learn in English and mathematics by using them in other subjects. This was clearly evident in the pupils' workbooks I looked at during the inspection.

You have been successful in improving pupils' spelling and handwriting skills. Systems are now in place to ensure that there is a cohesive whole-school approach to develop these skills. However, in spelling, agreed approaches need more time for them to become fully embedded and thereby have the whole school impact that is anticipated.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All staff have received the relevant and necessary child protection and 'Prevent' duty training and careful records are kept of that training, so that updates can be accessed in a timely manner. As a result, staff know how to recognise signs of neglect or abuse and are very clear about the school's procedures for reporting and recording any concerns they have regarding the safeguarding of pupils. Leaders and governors fulfil statutory requirements when appointing new members

of staff. For example, all staff are appropriately recruited and vetted to confirm their suitability to work with children.

Parents and pupils feel that the school is a safe place to be. Pupils spoke to me about the new fencing and gates, which makes them feel secure in school. Pupils are taught about how to keep themselves safe. They can speak knowledgeably about how to use the internet responsibly and what they should do to ensure their personal safety. They consider bullying and bad behaviour to be rare and they are confident that staff would listen to them and deal effectively with any problems or concerns they might have.

Inspection findings

- To judge whether the school remained good, I considered the quality of writing across the school because standards in writing are below those achieved in reading and mathematics. Evaluating work in pupils' English books, I found the sequence of lessons is planned strategically so that learning builds on previous learning. Additionally, I found that pupils were given many opportunities to write extensively and practise skills, including opportunities to write in the context of other curriculum areas. Pupils' writing skills are developing well. They use a good range of vocabulary because they read widely. Descriptive writing is also a strength. I was particularly impressed with the Year 6 pupils' descriptions of No Man's Land in the First World War. One pupil wrote about the 'gnarled' tree. You have already identified that the quality of pupils' writing could be further improved by a greater emphasis from teachers on challenging pupils to use a greater range and more sophisticated sentence constructions.
- Pupils get off to a strong start learning phonic sounds. Learning opportunities are well pitched so that pupils make strong progress. This has ensured that, year on year, the percentage of pupils attaining the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check is consistently well above the national average.
- You were right to be concerned about the level of attendance and persistent absence in the school. You have worked hard to address this by putting clear procedures in place to improve attendance. You have analysed attendance data to establish the rates of attendance for groups of pupils within the school. The small numbers of pupils involved means that a few pupils can make a large difference to the figures. You have identified the pupils with the lowest rates of attendance and have been vigilant in challenging poor attendance. Attendance is now in line with national averages, and levels of persistent absence have decreased. However, this continues to be an area of focus for the school.
- You correctly identified that spelling is an area for whole-school attention. You have implemented a new approach to spelling which ensures that spelling has a robust focus. This is beginning to show a positive impact. However, this approach is still in its infancy and continues to be an area for further development.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils are given greater awareness of the different types of sentence structures that they could use in their writing
- teachers continue to focus on improving the quality of spelling across the school
- leaders continue to explore ways of working with parents to ensure that their children's attendance is as good as it can be.

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

Yours sincerely

Helen Davies
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the assistant headteacher, other members of school staff and members of the governing body. Together, we planned the key lines of enquiry for the inspection. I visited classes in the school with the assistant headteacher to observe pupils' learning, speak with them and evaluate work in their books. I looked at an extensive range of books from the last academic year from each year group, as well as some from this academic year. I also spoke on the telephone to the local authority's head of learning and achievement. I spoke with pupils at breaktime and during the day. I spoke with parents at the start of the school day. I took into account the views of 53 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I looked at a range of documentation including information about safeguarding and attendance. I scrutinised and discussed the school's self-evaluation and plans for improvement.