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Mr Michael John
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Dear Mr John

Short inspection of Ireby CofE School

Following my visit to the school on 27 February 2019, 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 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 were appointed as headteacher in September 2018. Both you and the teachers are all new to post since the previous inspection. You have worked hard to gain the trust of the pupils, parents and carers, ensuring that this small rural school continues to serve the local community well.

Your evaluation of the school's effectiveness is honest. You have identified many of the school's strengths and where developments are needed. Pupil numbers are very low compared to other schools, therefore published data does not always reflect the progress that pupils make. However, pupils who attend the school continue to do well. Attendance rates remain well above the national average. The vast majority of children who leave the early years typically achieve a good level of development. For several years, pupils have achieved well in the Year 1 phonics screening check.

Parents speak highly of the school. Those that I spoke to at the start of the day and those who responded to the Ofsted surveys said that you and the teachers were approachable and supportive. Parents and pupils appreciate that you greet them at the gate each morning. Parents said that pupils behave well and are safe in your care. All of the parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, said that they would recommend the school. One view, typical of many, was: 'I feel respected and valued as a parent and appreciate how friendly and caring the staff are at Ireby'.

Pupils said that they enjoy attending school. They said that they all know each other

really well and that name-calling or bullying did not happen. Pupils were able to confidently discuss their work and some of their favourite subjects. Pupils appreciate the wide range of clubs that are offered after school. They have a secure understanding of how to stay safe while away from school and while using the internet. Pupils take on responsibilities as positive citizens; for example, they take turns to help clear and clean the dining room tables after lunch.

Governors are passionate for the school to be the best that it can be and to remain at the heart of the village. Governors articulate the vision for the school well and they are aware of the strengths and areas that need to be improved further. Governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities well.

At the previous inspection, school leaders were asked to improve the quality of teaching and learning, ensuring that pupils pronounce words accurately in order to improve their spellings. From talking to pupils and viewing samples of their work, I could see that the application of spelling is strong. Pupils that I spoke to in both classes were able to read their work to me clearly and accurately.

Inspectors also asked school leaders to provide children in the early years with more opportunities to consolidate their learning. Children in the early years benefit from effective teaching and learning that builds on prior learning well in order to further consolidate their understanding. The classroom and outdoor environment have been well-resourced to cater for the age ranges of the children in the early years and those in key stage 1. Children build upon their taught experiences through their play and exploration. For example, as part of their topic of changing and growing, children investigate the environment best suited for tadpoles to develop. Children confidently discuss what creatures they might find in the soil, and they enjoy planting seeds and discussing what they will need to grow. Opportunities to develop skills in writing and mathematics are evident across the learning environment. Skilled questioning from adults ensures that little learning time is lost. For example, when playing with the sand, children are gently encouraged to discuss and use terms such as 'heavier than' and 'more than' when making comparisons. Children play well together and share resources in a caring manner.

Safeguarding is effective.

As the designated leader for safeguarding, you have ensured that this work is given a high priority. There is an effective culture of safeguarding permeating all aspects of the school. Staff have received training in basic awareness of safeguarding as well as 'Prevent' duty training, to help them spot signs of potential radicalisation. Members of staff are aware of their responsibilities and remain alert and vigilant in their roles.

You and the vice-chair of the governing body are trained in safer recruitment. All checks on the suitability of adults who work in school are thorough. You have strong links with the local police community support officer who keeps the staff and pupils well-informed in how to stay safe.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, I focused on three lines of enquiry. The first of these related to the progress that pupils make in mathematics. Progress of pupils leaving key stage 2 in mathematics has declined over three consecutive years. As a result, a new approach to the teaching of mathematics has been introduced this year. You recognised that pupils were too used to completing work with little emphasis on explaining and reasoning out their answers. You have a renewed focus on developing the pupils' ability to talk about their learning and apply their skills. Pupils that I spoke to said that this type of learning helps them to discuss their ideas. They said that in the past they completed calculations with little discussion and few opportunities to develop and extend their thinking. Pupils enjoy using a range of practical resources to help them solve problems. They enjoy approaching mathematics in this new way. Work in pupils' books and the school's assessment information indicates that pupils are making good progress in mathematics.
- The second area that I looked at related to the school curriculum. You, along with the teachers, are in the process of redesigning and redefining your curriculum. You have gone back to the drawing board to maximise the potential to utilise the learning environment and unique geographical location of the school. For example, in your curriculum rationale, you state: 'We have a mini bus and we use it.' Pupils said that they really enjoyed a recent trip to a Roman fort and a Roman museum. As part of their wider work studying the Romans, pupils have made and tasted various historical bread recipes. The computing curriculum provides pupils with many relevant and interesting skills. For example, pupils use cameras and various software packages to create multimedia presentations and animations. They will use the compositions from their music lessons to add effects to their final pieces of work. Pupils enjoy singing, playing the recorder and glockenspiels, and they do not shy away from performing. In science, pupils engage in exciting activities that enable them to explore and develop their scientific skills. For example, in key stage 1 pupils make careful observations of tadpoles and how caterpillars change over time into butterflies. In key stage 2, pupils investigate the effects of the different foods on the human digestive system. Through the broad and exciting curriculum, pupils have a developing knowledge of their place in Britain, and they carefully consider the role of democracy and tolerance in their society.
- The final area that I looked at during the inspection focused on writing progress across the school. You have redesigned the taught writing process to provide pupils with a sharper focus on knowing what they need to do to achieve their best. In key stage 1, pupils now reflect carefully on their writing and assess their own work, drawing out where their strengths lie. Pupils in key stage 1 write with increasing levels of accuracy. For example, they write increasingly complex sentences using similes, while applying a range of punctuation accurately. Across all year groups, you have focused your teaching on enabling pupils to think carefully about the different structures of writing and the subtleties in genres. For example, pupils in key stage 2 have a strong understanding of the features of non-chronological report writing, linked closely to their broader curriculum learning. Across the school, pupils apply a broad range of punctuation and make

good use of their spelling knowledge in their written work across different subject areas. Standards of handwriting and presentation are inconsistent across the school, however, because there is no consistency in the way that handwriting is taught. Despite the many positive changes to the teaching of writing, school assessment information indicates that pupils in key stage 2 do not make the same strong progress that they make in mathematics and reading.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- standards of handwriting and presentation are improved through a consistent approach to teaching and expectations
- pupils in key stage 2 make better progress in writing.

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

John Donald
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held meetings with you and both teachers. I met with three members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body. I met with a representative of the local authority. Together, we visited both classes; we spoke to pupils about their learning and viewed samples of their work.

I examined a wide range of school documentation, including the single central safeguarding record, the school self-evaluation and the school improvement plan. I spoke to parents before school and informally to pupils throughout the day. I considered the 13 responses to Parent View, and the 11 free-text responses.