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Mr Lee Gallon
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Dear Mr Gallon

Short inspection of Farne Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 June 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 and the head of school both provide determined, dedicated and astute leadership. You describe the school as good and improving and I concur with this view. Governors and parents hold leaders and teachers in high regard. Pupils are proud of their school and it was great to see them working together enthusiastically in their classrooms. All were keen to describe the wide range of activities that the school offers and these include many clubs and visits outside of school. The school environment, both inside and outside, is stimulating and attractive. Displays of work in classrooms and communal areas are vibrant and celebrate pupils' achievements. Many show progression in different subject areas from early years through to Year 6.

Members of staff who talked to me, and those who responded to Ofsted's online staff survey, said they are proud to work in the school, and feel valued. They respect and value your leadership qualities and almost all say that the school has improved since the last inspection.

Parents are highly supportive of the school and this is evident in the number of positive responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. As one parent commented: 'Farne is a wonderful little school. My child loves coming to school and wants to take part in after-school activities too. He has always been encouraged to try his hardest and his behaviour has 100% improved because he has been made to feel appreciated and proud!' Parents who I spoke to at the beginning of the day

were keen to tell me about the sense of community and the hard work of the staff, who they describe as always being approachable.

Your relentless pursuit for developing the school further and providing the best for your pupils has meant that areas for improvement which were recommended in your last inspection report have been addressed thoroughly. There has been an emphasis on staff training and opportunities provided for staff to view successful practice in other schools, with the result that teaching has improved across the school. School improvement funding has been accessed and this has been used to help improve reading and mathematics. In the early years and Year 1, the teaching of phonics is effective and this is reflected in the high proportion of pupils who achieve the expected standard in the phonics screening check. Policies have been developed to ensure that teachers give good-quality feedback to their pupils. You have introduced the 'keep up, catch up' (KUCU) programme, which means that any pupils falling behind are quickly identified and intervention programmes are put in place. The appointment of a new special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator has improved provision for these pupils, who are closely monitored and well supported by teaching assistants. Improving teacher expertise in mathematics has meant that attainment has improved steadily in both key stages 1 and 2 over the past two years.

In 2018, results were generally in line with national averages at the end of key stage 2. Your assessment information shows that achievement in 2019 is likely to exceed that of 2018, with a larger proportion of pupils achieving the higher standard at the end of key stage 2. Tracking also shows that pupils who receive additional government funding are also likely to achieve strong results, both in comparison to their peers and against national averages. Your self-evaluation summary is precise and accurately identifies the main priorities for improvement.

The Smart Multi-Academy Trust and governing body both provide good support to the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

As the designated safeguarding leader, you ensure that all the necessary safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that all records are of a high quality and are meticulously kept. The school business manager ensures that all checks for the recruitment of staff are in place. Safeguarding training is treated as a priority and, during the past year, all staff and most governors have attended courses on child protection.

Pupils behave well and, when asked about bullying, they said, 'It happens rarely but, when it does, it is dealt with promptly and precisely.' They were also keen to tell me about the 'Well-being Club', where they could meet with a counsellor if they were anxious or worried about anything. Pupils understand the dangers related to use of the internet and were able to explain what to do to stay safe when online. The Year 6 e-safety team has been instrumental in showing younger pupils how to

stay safe. Pupils show a good awareness of road safety and older pupils receive 'bikeability' training.

The views of the pupils were reinforced by their parents. Nearly all of those who responded to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire agreed that their child is happy, safe and well-looked-after at school. Many submitted written comments praising staff for their caring approach. One parent summed this up when writing, 'Farne offers a safe, caring environment and children enjoy their time in school.'

Inspection findings

- My first key line of enquiry concerned overall attendance and persistent absence. This is because over the past three years overall attendance has been below the national average and persistent absence has been above average. You recognise that this is a concern and have made concerted efforts to bring about change. An attendance officer/family support worker maintains meticulous records, tracking the attendance patterns for every pupil. When concerns emerge, she quickly contacts parents and, in the case of vulnerable pupils, makes a home visit on the same day of absence. You explained that many absences are related to families taking holidays and you have been quick to address this issue through fixed penalty notices. Pupils were keen to explain to me the benefits of coming to school each day and also said how proud they felt when receiving a bronze, silver or gold star in recognition of full attendance. Analysis of school attendance records for the current academic year shows that overall attendance has improved and persistent absence has decreased considerably compared with the same period during the last academic year. However, although moving in the right direction, there is still work to be done and this is highlighted in your school improvement plan.
- My second line of enquiry concerned attainment and progress by the most able children in the early years. Much work has been carried out to improve provision for children in the early years. Significant staffing changes have been made and the interim early years leader has a clear vision for the future. During the morning, discrete mathematics learning is taking place. Most-able children are quickly identified and work programmes are designed to challenge them. Children are taught in small groups, with work suited to their level of ability. The interim early years leader explained that some of the most able children are even following the Year 1 mathematics curriculum. There is an emphasis on developing independent skills, and it was great to see children confidently writing number sentences for addition calculations. Daily mathematics tasks provide additional challenge for the most able. Parents are becoming increasingly involved in the education of their children and weekly homework tasks are set. A computer app has allowed early years staff the opportunity to share and celebrate children's achievement with their parents. During my visit, I was able to view an evidence file for mathematics work carried out in Nursery, which records some excellent practice.
- I was interested to find out more about progress by the most able in reading and this was another line of enquiry. Much work has been carried out to ensure that

the most able pupils are challenged. Senior leaders monitor teaching and moderate pupils' work. Extensive staff training has been carried out, with the result that teaching has improved. Teachers and teaching assistants are now more aware of what pupils need to do to reach the higher standards and are able to provide the necessary challenge. Good practice is shared within the school and teachers also work closely with colleagues in another local primary school. Feedback to pupils is effective, with the result that pupils know exactly what they need to do to improve their comprehension skills.

- Pupils in receipt of additional government funding achieve well and make good progress. In 2018, most reached the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2. However, only a small proportion reached the higher standard. It is clear from your targets and pupils' exercise books that the most able disadvantaged pupils are now being challenged to attain the highest possible standards. Your tracking suggests that almost one quarter of disadvantaged pupils in the current Year 6 cohort will reach the higher standard this year.
- Some work needs to be done to raise the profile of reading across the school. Those pupils that I listened to read did so accurately, with fluency and increasing expression. They were able to answer comprehension questions related to the text accurately. Some pupils, however, said that they do not enjoy reading and seldom use the school library.
- Across key stages 1 and 2, a strong writing culture has been established. Pupils are given a wide range of opportunities to write with a purpose. For example, Year 6 pupils, who had recently visited Chopwell Woods, had been involved in writing an information guide and an application letter for a position as an apiarist at the country park. In a Year 2 class, pupils were writing wonderful descriptions of a sabre-toothed tiger and were able to use a range of adjectives and adverbs. Strong links have been established with other subject areas, particularly history, and in one class pupils were keen to show me their writing about Ernest Shackleton and his journey to Antarctica. It is clear that pupils enjoy their writing tasks. Skilful teaching, accurate feedback, well-chosen resources, displays of good examples and peer support all encourage effective learning. In key stage 1 and key stage 2, the proportion reaching the expected standard in writing is significantly higher than the national average. However, the proportion of pupils who achieve the higher standard is slightly lower than the national average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to work hard to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence
- staff set about creating a reading culture across the school which includes improved library facilities that provide high-quality reading texts
- staff continue to challenge the most able pupils with the result that a greater proportion achieve the higher standard.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the acting chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Newcastle-upon-Tyne. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Richard Knowles
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection, I held meetings with you, the head of school, the leader for English, the early years leader, the school business manager, the acting chief executive officer of the Smart Multi-Academy Trust and members of the governing body. I evaluated documentation, including the school's self-evaluation summary, the school's improvement plan, assessment data and the recent external safeguarding review. I spoke with a number of parents at the beginning of the day and considered the 70 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I met formally with two groups of pupils from a range of year groups. The first group discussed safeguarding and behaviour with me. The second group talked about reading, and I listened to them all read. I also spoke with pupils informally in lessons. You, the head of school and I observed a range of learning across all classes, including mathematics in early years, phonics in Year 1, writing in Year 2 and writing in all key stage 2 classes. The head of school and I also visited the early years to gauge the quality of outdoor provision. During the afternoon, I carried out a scrutiny of the written work in English from several year groups and looked specifically at writing. I also analysed the responses from Ofsted's pupil and staff surveys.