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Mrs Amanda Taylor
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Taylor

Short inspection of Wark Church of England First School

Following my visit to the school on 5 October 2017, 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

Since the last inspection, you have provided committed and perceptive leadership that has secured the continued development of the school. You have achieved this while at the same time successfully fulfilling your other headteacher role at another local school. With your deputy headteacher and governors, you have accurately identified the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. The school's detailed self-evaluation documentation and improvement plans clearly identify the priorities for improving the school further. The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You, your staff and governors have created a welcoming, harmonious and inclusive school. Your pupils told me that some of the best things about your school are that everyone is friendly, and teachers and staff help them with their work or if they have any concerns. Furthermore, you have high expectations for pupils' achievement and strive to ensure that pupils learn well across the curriculum. As a result, pupils' confidence develops and they generally make good progress academically. Parents' overwhelmingly positive responses to Ofsted's online parent survey, Parent View, show how highly parents value the work of everyone in your school.

Leaders and staff have successfully tackled the area for improvement identified at the previous inspection. They have also maintained the previously identified strengths. The provision for pupils' personal development and welfare is a key

strength of the school. Your curriculum, including visits outside of the local community, ensures that pupils' citizenship skills are well developed.

The area for improvement at your previous inspection was to further raise pupils' achievement, especially in mathematics. Teachers are now providing increased opportunities for pupils to develop their problem-solving and reasoning skills. The use of online mathematics activities is motivating pupils to increase their mathematical learning in school and at home. You have reviewed your school's approaches to providing feedback and informing pupils how to improve their work, including in mathematics. As a result, in the main pupils now make good progress in mathematics and they achieve well at the end of Reception, Year 2 and Year 4.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, your staff and governors give the highest priority to keeping pupils safe, and there is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. Leaders and governors have ensured that current safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are of a high quality. They carry out appropriate checks for all staff, governors and volunteers. Staff and governors receive regular and appropriate training so they know how to keep pupils safe. This includes training about how to protect pupils from radicalisation and extremism. Consequently, staff and governors understand the safeguarding procedures and their own responsibilities.

The very positive relationships between staff and pupils and of pupils with their peers reflect the caring ethos in school. Your curriculum helps pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including when they are online. Pupils know the different forms that bullying can take and know that staff will help them if they ever have concerns. Furthermore, they report that they have not encountered any bullying at your school. All parents who responded to Parent View agree that their children feel safe in your school and that staff ensure that children are well behaved.

Inspection findings

- A determined focus by you and your staff has brought about improvements in pupils' progress in reading and mathematics. The encouragement to read regularly, supported by online assessments, is motivating pupils to read and developing their comprehension skills. Developments in the teaching of mathematics are ensuring that teachers are providing effective coverage of the mathematics national curriculum. As a result, pupils make good progress in reading and mathematics, and their attainment at the end of Year 2 is above the national averages in these two subjects. Similarly, at the end of Year 4 the vast majority of pupils have made good progress in reading and mathematics. Most pupils have achieved the expected standards in these subjects, and many work at a higher standard.
- The teaching of phonics is ensuring that pupils are developing their early reading skills well. In 2016, the proportion of pupils working at the expected standard on the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1 was similar to that found nationally. In 2017, your school's phonics results improved further.

- You have correctly identified the need to improve pupils' progress in writing. Some of the actions you have taken are beginning to bear fruit. For example, the use of quality texts to inspire pupils to write is starting to have a positive effect across the school. This was evident in the lessons we observed together and when we reviewed the pupils' work in their books. Regular handwriting practice and rewards such as a 'pen licence' for older pupils are resulting in a discernible improvement in the quality of pupils' handwriting. However, your own analysis of pupils' progress and current attainment in writing shows that there is further work to do in order to achieve the better outcomes found in your reading and mathematics results.
- Children in Reception make good progress in all aspects of the curriculum apart from their writing skills. Consequently, in 2017, the proportion of children in school who achieved a good level of development fell, and this placed the school's results below the national average. You and your staff have responded to this promptly. Working alongside the local authority early years consultant, staff have increased the opportunities for children to improve their writing skills in the early years classrooms. There is evidence of children completing a range of writing activities. However, sometimes the expectations of staff are too low or staff do not make the most of opportunities to help children, and this limits children's progress.
- The inclusion of a small number of nursery children in the early years class began in September 2017. During our visit to the early years classrooms, we noted that these children had settled well into the provision and were enjoying working with the older Reception children.
- You have ensured that the recently introduced early years arrangements are supported by guidance from the local authority and diocese to develop good-quality early years provision. During our visit to early years, one area we identified for swift attention was to ensure that adults are deployed effectively to supervise children and engage them productively with the range of learning opportunities. You had already taken steps to address this by the end of the inspection.
- Governors have a good understanding of the school's priorities and the community the school serves. For example, they responded promptly when the opportunity for establishing provision for nursery children in school arose. Through consultation with school leaders, parents and the local authority, they were successful in getting this initiative off the ground. Governors provide an effective balance of support and challenge. Their regular visits into school and meetings with leaders, staff and pupils ensure that they carefully check the effect of school improvement actions.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the planned actions to improve writing are fully implemented and embedded so that pupils' progress and attainment in writing improve

- the new arrangements in the early years are developed further to provide high-quality teaching for nursery and reception pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Reeves
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I discussed the work of the school with you, your deputy headteacher and your leaders for English and early years. I observed and spoke with pupils during playtime and at other times during the day. I held telephone discussions with representatives from the local authority and the diocese. I met with three governors who were able to provide me with additional information. I took into account school documentation, assessment information, policies and information posted on the school website. I considered the 22 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View. I reviewed the nine responses to the pupil survey and the six responses to the staff survey. With you, I visited three classes to observe teaching and learning. I looked at pupils' English work to help evaluate the quality of teaching and learning over time. I considered behaviour and attendance records and information relating to safeguarding.