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Mr William Kirtley
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Kirtley

Short inspection of Byers Green Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 1 December 2015, 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 February 2011.

This school continues to be good.

You and the leadership team have maintained the good quality of education provided by the school since the last inspection. You have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and work tirelessly to make sure that all pupils learn as well as they can. Pupils who spoke with me during the inspection confirmed that teachers explain things well to them, especially if they are 'stuck' with their work, and said, 'they get us thinking'. There is a very positive climate within the school where pupils' contributions are valued and staff morale is high. Pupils are proud of their school and they look after each other very well indeed.

The previous inspection report identified the need for the school to ensure that rates of progress for children in the early years improved. This has been tackled robustly and in 2015, compared with the national picture, a higher than average proportion of children reached a good level of development. The curriculum and the quality of teaching have improved and there is now a range of exciting and stimulating activities which motivate and engage children in their learning. Adults are very sensitive to, and aware of, children's individual needs, and intervene appropriately to move children on in their learning. A particular strength is the way in which children with special educational needs are supported and fully included in all activities that are on offer.

Across the school, there is now more consistency in the way in which staff use assessment information to plan activities to meet pupils' varying abilities. Pupils are challenged appropriately and work is pitched at the right level for them. There is some high-quality practice within the school but this is not always fully shared with all staff to improve the quality of teaching to outstanding. Marking and feedback are used effectively to help pupils improve the content of their work and to address any misconceptions. However, the quality of pupils' handwriting and the presentation of their work is not always as good as it could be.

You, governors and other leaders make secure judgements on the school's performance and know the strengths and areas to be improved. Governors play a strategic role in ensuring the school continues to improve by challenging leaders and checking for themselves how well the school is doing. The school development plan identifies the right priorities to improve the school further, but the criteria by which success can be measured are not always precise enough.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, your staff and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Frequent training, alongside effective systems and procedures, mean that both staff and governors are well aware of what constitutes risk and ensures that all give high priority to keeping pupils safe. Pupils who spoke to me during the inspection confirmed that they feel safe. They say they are taught how to keep themselves safe when using computer technology and when walking to and from school with the 'walking bus'. Older pupils look after the younger ones to make sure they get home safely. All parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, said that their children are well looked after and feel safe.

Inspection findings

- You and other leaders have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development in the school. As a result, the school's self-evaluation is accurate. You have tackled the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection with rigour. The school development plan clearly identifies appropriate priorities to help improve the school further. However, the criteria by which success can be measured are not precise enough.
- You quickly identify any pupils who are not making the progress they should and put into place appropriate strategies to help those pupils improve. Leaders then check to make sure that these strategies have the required impact on pupils' learning. You regularly check the quality of teaching and learning and provide training for staff to enable them to meet the targets you set in order to improve their practice. We agreed from our observations of the quality of teaching that all staff would benefit from sharing their good practice with each other.

- This term you have introduced a new curriculum in line with national requirements as well as a linked system to assess and record pupils' achievements. You made appropriate decisions on when to implement these based on the needs of the pupils. Although it is too early to evaluate the impact of these changes, you have planned carefully to ensure that all pupils are suitably challenged and will be able to meet the higher expectations required of the new National Curriculum. The curriculum is stimulating and exciting and is enriched by a wide range of educational trips, including residential visits. This motivates and engages pupils well. The curriculum is further enhanced by an abundance of extracurricular activities. There are high levels of participation in music and sporting activities and this is an indicator that the additional funding for sport is promoting positive attitudes to exercise.
- Staff promote pupils' speaking, listening and writing skills well through providing opportunities for them to share and evaluate each other's work. Pupils are developing their understanding of different types of writing and can identify, for example, similes and metaphors in their partner's writing in the Years 3 and 4 class. While the content of their work is of good quality, pupils' handwriting and the presentation of their work are not always as good as they could be. Pupils who spoke to me said that they thoroughly enjoy reading, and results show that they are making rapid progress in developing their skills. They have many opportunities to read on a one-to-one basis with volunteers and with members of staff, particularly in guided reading sessions. They thoroughly enjoy their work based on a particular book or text. Pupils are making more progress in mathematics because there are increasing opportunities to apply their number and calculation skills in investigations and problem-solving activities.
- There is a calm, purposeful and orderly atmosphere in lessons and around the school. Pupils confirmed that this is always the case. They are adamant that there is no bullying and if an incident should occur, they are confident that staff would deal with it promptly. Older pupils are particularly proud of the way in which they help to look after younger pupils and say that everyone is friendly towards one another.
- Pupils make good progress from their starting points. Results from checks in Year 1 on pupils' understanding of the sounds that letters represent (phonics), have been above average over the last three years, and outcomes at the end of Key Stage 1 have been at least broadly average. However, there is some variance because of the small cohort sizes. At the end of Key Stage 2, outcomes have risen over time in all subjects to above average. There was a notable improvement in outcomes in English grammar, punctuation and spelling to well above average in 2015. Disadvantaged pupils performed above their peers in school and other pupils nationally, and pupils with disabilities and those with special educational needs also achieved well. The most-able pupils attained very high outcomes, particularly in mathematics.

- You, other leaders and governors are highly committed to improving the school and to ensuring that all pupils develop into responsible citizens. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, not only academically, but in their personal development. They show great respect for, and tolerance of, those from backgrounds different from their own. They are proud to take responsibility within the school, for example, as members of the school sports council, they assist the school sport apprentice to lead a range of activities at playtimes and lunchtimes. They have a good understanding of democracy through, for example, a visit from the Parliament Education Service. This has inspired one child to want to become prime minister. Consequently, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school development plan contains more precise criteria by which success can be measured
- all staff share their good practice and skills with each other in order to improve the quality of teaching to outstanding
- pupils' handwriting and the presentation of their work improve.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Durham County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Christine Inkster
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and the deputy headteacher, all staff, a group of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and three other governors. I also held a telephone discussion with a representative of the local authority. You and I visited all classrooms to observe teaching, talk to pupils and look at their work. We discussed your current school self-evaluation, school improvement plan and the arrangements for safeguarding in the school. I reviewed the minutes of governing body meetings, your records of monitoring the quality of teaching, school performance information and reports from the local authority. I considered the 14 responses from Parent View, the results of the school's own parental questionnaire and responses to a questionnaire completed by 11 staff.