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Mrs Greta Ellis
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Ellis

Short inspection of Kirkoswald Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 23 February 2016, 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.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. All staff and governors share your enthusiastic, innovative approach, and your high aspirations for the children. You have all ensured that your school continues to improve. Teachers nurture and inspire pupils to fulfil their potential, so pupils develop a 'have-a-go' attitude and an independent spirit. Pupils' excellent behaviour and their thirst for learning make a strong contribution to their achievement. In line with your stated aims, all staff work hard to make learning 'an exciting, relevant and challenging adventure'.

Pupils and staff value the friendly, supportive and exciting environment they work in. Comments from staff such as, 'I love coming to work! Our children are a delight to be around', and 'this is a very happy school with an excellent, enthusiastic headteacher' are typical. Such comments reflect the joy and pride that staff and pupils take in their work. There is very effective collaboration between staff. Teachers all have leadership roles, which they fulfil enthusiastically; they learn from and support each other effectively. You make the most of the skills and talents of teaching assistants and non-teaching staff, so all make a valuable contribution.

You have successfully tackled the areas that were identified for further improvement at the last inspection. Teachers have successfully raised attainment in mathematics at Key Stage 1 by giving pupils more opportunities for mathematical activities across the curriculum. In the early years provision, you have done the best you can to use the limited outdoor space to promote learning across all areas of the curriculum. The school's outdoor space for pupils of all ages is limited, but you ensure that pupils make excellent use of the natural environment and facilities beyond school. Your innovative approach ensures that pupils develop their leadership and social skills and an in-depth understanding of the natural world.

The continued drive for improvement from all staff and governors ensures that the school does not stand still. For example, you are currently focusing on improving pupils' skills in mathematical reasoning in order to raise their achievement in mathematics even further. You are also reviewing your approach to teaching phonics (the sounds that letters make) and grammar, punctuation and spelling skills. Your recent introduction of 'global learning' is enriching pupils' understanding of the diverse world they live in and the core values that underpin being a good citizen.

The views of parents and pupils reflect those of staff. Pupils love being in school. They relish the opportunities they have to learn within the exciting curriculum and the many before- and after-school activities. The vast majority of parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and all of those I spoke to, are very pleased with the school. Typical comments include: 'we are continually impressed with the confidence and happiness the school instils in its pupils'; 'a lovely community school which excels in knowing its pupils and striving for them to achieve their best'; and 'children become well-rounded individuals with a positive attitude and a love of learning'. This inspection endorses such views.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school provides a safe and nurturing environment so that pupils feel extremely safe and develop caring attitudes. Pupils say that 'bullying never happens' and are wholly confident that they can talk to adults in school, should they have any concerns. They know what to do if they ever feel threatened online. Older pupils look after the younger ones and show respect for each other's views and opinions. All parents who responded to the online questionnaire feel that that their children are safe and happy in school.

Leaders and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and they keep high-quality records. Policies are updated regularly and staff have completed relevant training, including on the government's Prevent strategy. Governors keep up to date with changes in legislation and they are aware of the need to become better informed about how staff can protect pupils from the risk of exposure to extreme views and opinions, including when they are online.

Inspection findings

- Strong teamwork, community spirit and inspirational leadership are key factors in the success of the school. Pupils, staff, governors and parents all make valuable contributions to the happy, purposeful environment. As one parent said, 'all children are known as individuals by all staff, from the head to lunchtime supervisors, enabling them to respond to needs exceptionally well'.
- You are outward looking and make the most of opportunities to work with other schools and promote professional development for your staff and others. The school's active participation in the Rural Eden Cluster of small schools provides opportunities to share good practice and to gain from peer review. Your work as a local leader of education and use of the school as a placement for students and aspiring leaders supports staff to develop their own leadership skills.
- Your self-evaluation is accurate, and improvement planning focuses on the most important actions to raise achievement. Leaders across the school have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for further development. They lead improvement in their areas of responsibility enthusiastically and successfully.
- Teachers strive to make learning interesting and are skilled in prompting pupils to think for themselves and solve problems. They have cultivated affirming and easy relationships with pupils, while still maintaining high expectations for their behaviour and achievement. Consequently, pupils grow in confidence, take responsibility for their behaviour and rise to challenges.
- Teachers assess learning and plan activities carefully to meet pupils' varied needs within each mixed-age class. Teaching assistants make a good contribution, taking small groups and providing additional support. Pupils who need extra help are generally supported well. A very small minority of parents expressed a concern about the way the school supports children with special educational needs, but this did not emerge as an issue during this inspection.
- Teachers are looking at ways to provide the most-able pupils with more challenging activities to deepen and extend their learning, but there are times when the most-able pupils in each class could be challenged further.
- Pupils' excellent behaviour, good attendance and extremely positive attitudes to learning reflect the attitudes and expectations of staff. Pupils are highly motivated by the 'bead' and 'crew point' system, where they are rewarded for good behaviour with beads that contribute to privileges for the whole of the 'crew'.
- Children in the early years provision settle happily and develop a love of learning in a secure and safe environment. They are taught effectively and develop their knowledge and skills well under adults' guidance. However, during the inspection it was noted that the activities that are available for them to choose from independently are not always stimulating.

- Children's knowledge, skills and pre-school experiences vary widely when they start in the Reception class. Children make good progress from their various starting points in all areas of learning. Those that do not reach a good level of development by the end of Reception catch up in Year 1 because they have been given firm foundations for further learning.
- Pupils continue to make good progress as they move through the school. Attainment at Key Stage 1 has improved in all subjects since the last inspection. Pupils do especially well in reading and writing, with some making better than expected progress across Key Stage 2 to attain above-average standards at the end of Year 6. Pupils' progress in mathematics is improving and is mostly good, but it is not yet on a par with their reading and writing. In 2015, attainment in mathematics in the standardised assessments in Year 2 and Year 6 was broadly average.
- The rich curriculum makes a strong contribution to pupils' academic achievement and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It enhances their knowledge and skills across many subjects, as well as promoting good health and social skills.
- You have made good use of staff specialisms and bought in additional expertise to enhance provision and widen pupils' participation, for example in music and sports. Extra-curricular opportunities are varied and enrich pupils' experiences. The before- and after-school clubs are popular and pupils are able to broaden their experiences through visits, such as the recent trip to Liverpool.
- Pupils benefit greatly from the broad and interesting curriculum. We agreed that the next step in curriculum development is to check the coverage of knowledge and skills in foundation subjects (such as history, geography, design and technology) as pupils move through school.
- Governors are active and committed partners in the continued development of the school. They know the school well due to their frequent visits, discussions with staff and pupils, and good understanding of information about pupils' progress and attainment.
- Parents' views are overwhelmingly positive; parents are extremely pleased with the breadth of the curriculum, the quality of teaching and the inspirational leadership.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the actions already planned to raise achievement in mathematics and improve teaching in phonics, grammar and spelling continue
- teachers check that the most-able pupils in each class are making the best progress possible
- you check that pupils are developing their knowledge and skills in the foundation subjects progressively as they move through school
- children in the early years have stimulating activities to choose from when they are learning independently.

Yours sincerely

Jean Olsson-Law

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, three leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and its vice-chair, and a representative from the local authority. I spoke with pupils during lessons, around the school and in a meeting. I spoke with many parents at the start of the school day and took account of 21 responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, and letters from parents. I also took account of five responses to the online questionnaires from staff and four written responses. I visited all classrooms during lessons and looked at samples of pupils' work across a range of subjects in each class. I looked at information about pupils' progress and attainment and at your self-evaluation and action planning. I evaluated safeguarding procedures, including policies to keep children safe, and records of training, safeguarding checks and incidents.