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Mrs Lynn Rae
Headteacher
Milecastle Primary School
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Dear Mrs Rae

Short inspection of Milecastle Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 1 March 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. You and your leaders have set a clear vision in order to continue the school's successful improvement journey. Your vision is shared by all your staff and governing body.

You set extremely high expectations and make sure that the school is a calm and purposeful environment in which the majority of pupils now do well, both socially and academically. The areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report have generally been tackled successfully. You are continuing work on areas you have identified, such as challenging the most-able pupils to make more progress, and closing the gaps between the outcomes for boys and girls in Reception and Key Stage 1. You have introduced a new assessment system that is ensuring that pupils are identified very rapidly if they need more help and support. This is put into place very quickly and efficiently and is ensuring that identified pupils are able to catch up.

The well-being and care of the pupils are at the very heart of your every action. You care deeply about all of the pupils in your charge, and this sentiment is held by all staff members and governors. The school's vision to give all pupils 'a bright start' is certainly what is being demonstrated by all staff at Milecastle. This is a real strength of the school. Staff are dedicated to providing the highest levels of care, and ensuring that pupils are tolerant and respectful of classmates and adults alike.

Governors wholeheartedly support you and have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas that need to be improved. They strive to better themselves as a governing body, by ensuring that they access training to meet their needs and to make sure that they are up to date with current practice.

Leaders have demonstrated a strong capacity to deliver further improvements. They have put in place robust actions to address standards that were below those expected by the end of Key Stage 1. As a result, the attainment of pupils at the end of Year 2 in 2015 improved significantly in all subjects so that they reached standards that were in line with those seen nationally.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, your staff and governors are very committed to safeguarding the pupils in your care and promoting their welfare.

Staff and governors receive suitable and relevant training and guidance so that they know how to keep pupils safe. This is updated regularly, and systems are in place to ensure that new members of staff receive the training before commencing their duties. Additionally, a number of leaders and governors have completed safer recruitment training and, as a result, the checks on the suitability of staff to work with children are thorough.

Leaders demonstrate persistence when following up pupils who are absent from school. You and your staff work effectively with the local authority attendance officer and the family welfare officer from the partner secondary school, Walbottle Campus, to ensure that pupils attend school regularly. Pupils who are persistently absent are monitored and tracked, with measures put in place to support more regular attendance. As a result, pupils' attendance is improving.

Inspection findings

- You and your leaders have a very accurate view of how well the school is doing and you have identified appropriate areas that need to be improved. Leaders use this information to make sure that the quality of teaching remains under close scrutiny. Checks on aspects of teaching are regular and ensure that staff are identified quickly if they need further development and support. Strong professional development and networking opportunities through the Outer West Learning Trust have been used effectively to support staff development. This has led to success in sustaining good outcomes for pupils in the national check on phonics (letters and the sounds they make) at the end of Year 1, and improved outcomes for pupils by the end of Year 2.
- Staff morale is high at the school. There is a real sense that staff and leaders at all levels are working hard together to ensure that they do their very best for all of the pupils. This atmosphere of teamwork has resulted in very positive relationships among pupils and staff.

- Teaching across the school is consistently good or better. Teachers provide interesting activities which capture pupils' imaginations and spark their curiosity. Year 6 pupils were eager to share their views about Tennyson's poem *The Charge of the Light Brigade*. They showed a deep understanding linked to their empathetic views, which they articulated to a high standard.
- Leaders have made sure that attainment in English and mathematics by the end of Key Stage 2 over time is well above the national average, and that pupils are making strong progress, particularly in reading and mathematics. This is because they have focused their energies on making improvements with precision.
- Books and media resources are used to interest both boys and girls in reading through topic work. 'Superheroes' in Reception class and 'Space' in Year 2 are particularly engaging the boys in their learning. However, opportunities to engage boys in Reception in reading and writing are sometimes missed when they choose activities such as construction. In mathematics, computer software is giving pupils opportunities to practise their mathematical skills at home, before school and during lunchtimes. The added element of competition is motivating pupils to push themselves further. However, there are not enough pupils reaching the higher levels, particularly in mathematics and writing in Key Stage 1, and in writing in Key Stage 2. More work needs to be done to ensure that the most-able pupils acquire the skills to write at a higher level. Furthermore, in mathematics, these pupils need to be given opportunities to demonstrate a deeper knowledge and understanding of mathematical concepts when mastering the skills.
- The implementation of the school's marking policy is having a positive impact on the amount of progress pupils are currently making. Teachers make very effective use of teaching assistants and other adults to help pupils understand how to improve their work. Pupils told me that they find the time they are given to respond to teachers' comments very helpful, and that they are able to use these improvements in subsequent pieces of work. Further work needs to ensure that the marking policy is consistently applied across the school, and leaders are currently tackling this issue.
- Parents are overwhelmingly supportive. They appreciate the hard work and dedication the staff have for their children. Parents have found it particularly beneficial to receive information about how calculations are taught in mathematics so that they can help their children at home. In addition to this, parents I spoke to directly supported the view from 51 responses to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire, Parent View, that Milecastle is a school that is well led, looks after their children and responds appropriately to their concerns. The vast majority of parents would recommend this school to others. One parent told me, 'they don't just look after our children, they look after us too'. In addition, a letter to me from a parent made clear that you and your staff are held in very high regard for providing opportunities to develop the confidence and character of pupils.

- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a clear strength of the school. Behaviour and conduct in lessons and around the school are very good. Rewards such as 'Star of the Week' demonstrate the whole-school approach to having positive attitudes. Staff set high expectations and model appropriate behaviour and social skills, such as attentively listening and responding positively in difficult circumstances. Pupils are given opportunities to participate in residential visits, for example to an outdoor centre in Northumberland, which encourages pupils to work together to gain success. Furthermore, participating in community events such as litter-picking, Greggs' Cancer Run and The Big Sing develops pupils' understanding about becoming responsible citizens, both locally and globally.
- The achievement partner from Newcastle local authority rightly recognises that leadership is strong, and provides effective challenge, along with opportunities for honest discussion with leaders and governors. Furthermore, focused training sessions for staff linked to the school improvement priorities have been delivered to good effect.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- children in Reception class are given more opportunities, particularly the boys, to develop and practise their reading and writing skills
- the most-able pupils acquire the skills to write at a higher level, and that they are given opportunities to deepen their knowledge and skill in mathematics so that they can make accelerated progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Suzanne Lithgow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your senior leaders, a representative from the local authority and two members of the governing body, including the Chair of the Governing Body. I visited classrooms with you to observe the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. I scrutinised pupils' work, including in writing and mathematics. I spoke with a range of parents, pupils in lessons and a selected group of pupils at lunchtime, about the school. I also reviewed information from the 51 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I evaluated recent information about the progress pupils make across the school and how the accuracy of assessments is secured. I considered the school improvement plans, and other documents, including the outcomes of monitoring activities, reports to governors and local authority reports.