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Mrs Helen Harrison
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Dear Mrs Harrison

Short inspection of Scremerston First 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 have successfully preserved the warm, caring ethos of a school at the heart of its community. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the steady communication between home and school, and are particularly appreciative of how insightfully each child is known as an individual. Several parents would recommend the school to others 'unreservedly' and pupils are united in their opinion that their school is a safe and happy place. The notion of teamwork and constructive partnerships extends well beyond the school gates. Candid relationships and mutual respect are central to the success of the school.

Leaders and governors have tackled the areas identified for improvement at the previous inspection effectively. Pupils' books demonstrate heightened expectations of the quality of pupils' writing across the curriculum. Improved consistency of teachers' marking and feedback to pupils is also evident, particularly within English and mathematics. Teachers make the links between subjects more explicit, offering opportunities, for example, for pupils to apply their mathematical skills across the curriculum. Consequently, pupils' achievements in writing and mathematics have improved across key stages.

In addressing the requirement in the previous inspection report to improve the impact of leadership and management, you devised clear, measurable plans which

are focused on the correct priorities to drive improvement. You regularly review improvement planning and are already making amendments to ensure that the gaps in attainment that you have identified between some boys and girls in English are tackled. You have also ensured that the monitoring of teaching and learning is now firmly linked to pupil outcomes.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, and governors, give safety and the safeguarding of pupils your highest regard. Policies and practices are regularly reviewed to ensure that the most up-to-date guidance is followed and understood by staff. For example, 'Prevent' training has recently been undertaken by all staff and your interview procedures are currently being revised to reflect the most recent guidance. Staff and governors talk knowledgeably about how to keep pupils safe from harm, holding vigilant, appropriate attitudes to protection and welfare.

Pupils agree with each other that this is 'a very safe school'. They describe their peers as kind and well mannered. They have a good understanding of the different forms that bullying can take and are confident that poor behaviour is rare in their school. Pupils have complete faith in adults or 'buddies' to help them where needed.

Inspection findings

- Your thorough knowledge of the school, the community you serve and each pupil has enabled you to sustain good standards of education since the previous inspection. You have established a distinctively welcoming ethos that actively encourages the community to take part in the work of the school. Strong, positive links with parents, and the on-site pre-school, result in smooth transitions, confident, settled children and a shared understanding of the needs of children and families.
- Staff changes have impacted on the pace of improvement to some degree, recently. You have had to shoulder additional responsibilities while teachers new to the school learn the ropes. You have acted quickly to ensure that newly qualified teachers and teachers new to the school have the support, challenge and information required to maintain the high standards that you expect. Your calm, considered manner in managing this period of adjustment is proving effective, enabling others to steadily assume roles and responsibilities at an appropriate pace. Consequently, disruption for staff and pupils has been minimal.
- Governors are well informed and have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas requiring further attention. The wide-ranging skills they bring to the school are used to good effect through regular monitoring visits, reviews of pupils' outcomes and frequent discussions with parents and staff. This equips governors well to both support and challenge school leaders to drive improvement.

- The quality of teaching and learning is carefully monitored by you and other leaders. You have a firm grasp of the professional development needs of each staff member and ensure that training, coaching and mentoring meets individual needs as well as the needs of the school. Along with other leaders, you regularly examine the work of pupils in books and on display, giving clear guidance to teachers as to how further improvements can be made. As a result, staff are challenged and supported successfully.
- Provision for children in the early years has developed well and there is a visible trend of improvement in children's achievements. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development in 2015 was above the national average. This means that children in the early years are increasingly well prepared for Year 1.
- Last year, all pupils in Year 1 met the expected standard in the national phonics (letters and the sounds they make) screening test, thereby ensuring that pupils were well prepared to meet the reading demands of Year 2. All pupils re-sitting the test in Year 2 in 2015 successfully met requirements, meaning they too were better placed to meet the challenges of Key Stage 2 work. These results exceeded national standards and denote a real strength of the teaching in the school.
- Outcomes for pupils in Key Stage 1 have been broadly in line with those seen nationally over the last three years, with signs of steady improvement. Pupils are increasingly making expected or better progress and in 2015 the standards in reading, writing and mathematics were slightly better than those seen nationally. You are acutely aware of the gaps between girls and boys in reading and writing, and have quickly put appropriate actions in place to address the relatively weaker performance of boys in these areas. The use of 'cold and hot' writing tasks and 'DEAR (drop everything and read) time' are, for example, beginning to have a positive impact on boys' engagement and interest.
- Key Stage 2 pupils are effectively prepared for the next stage of their education. By the end of Year 4, the proportion making expected or better progress is in keeping with national averages. Teaching strategies in mathematics are supporting pupils' rapid acquisition of basic mathematical skills. Links with other schools are strong and arrangements for transition to middle school are sensitive to the needs of individual pupils and families.
- Behaviour is good throughout the school. Pupils are confident and happy, with all age groups playing cooperatively during well-supervised breaktimes. They are proud of their school and value the extensive opportunities that the school affords them; 'Messy Monday', the running club and the cricket club are particular favourites. Attendance is similar to national averages and rigorous systems are in place to address any instances of poorer punctuality or attendance.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- gaps in attainment between boys and girls in reading and writing narrow in Key Stage 1
- new staff are rapidly equipped with subject leadership skills to fully support the headteacher with school improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Fiona Manuel
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you, your senior leaders, a group of governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, and your school improvement partner from the local authority. I spoke with several groups of pupils formally and informally during breaktimes and in lessons. We observed teaching and learning in all classes and also dropped into several additional support sessions across the morning and afternoon. I scrutinised school information and documentation, including records of the monitoring of teaching and learning and the progress of current pupils. I examined policies and information posted on the school website. I evaluated the work in pupils' books alongside a senior leader. I also took the views of parents and staff into account from their responses to questionnaires.