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Mr Paul Heeley  
Headteacher  
Amble Links First School  
Links Avenue  
Links Estate  
Amble  
Morpeth  
Northumberland  
NE65 0SA

Dear Mr Heeley

### **Short inspection of Amble Links First School**

Following my visit to the school on 14 April 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 January 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 built on many of the school's strengths since the previous inspection. Parents, pupils and staff agree that you are extremely visible in and around the school community. They value your availability and are appreciative of your approachable, proactive manner. You have created a strong culture of inclusivity with a successful 'it's okay' approach to celebrating differences and exploring similarities. These inclusive values are gainfully threaded throughout the work of the school as you clearly communicate your vision to others.

Leaders and governors have tackled the areas identified for improvement at the previous inspection effectively. Positive outcomes for pupils are the result. Wider availability and better use of up-to-date information and computer technology resources enhance teaching and learning opportunities across the school. Upgrades to the environment in the early years mean that children now engage with a wide range of challenging and stimulating learning resources and choices. The proportion of children reaching expected standards at the end of the Reception year has steadily improved to sit above the national figure. The performance of pupils in the Year 1 phonics (the sounds that letters make) check also improved to above national averages. Key stage 1 standards have been maintained. The proportion of key stage

1 pupils reaching expected standards across subjects remains broadly in line with those seen nationally. Pupils in key stage 2 make good progress and are effectively prepared for the next stage in their education.

Since the last inspection, a new deputy headteacher and several new teaching members of staff have been appointed. Some restructuring of existing staff has also taken place. You and your leadership team work well in partnership and are clear about the school's strengths and weaknesses. Together, you devise effective systems of working, appropriately identifying priorities and striving to take the school forward to the next level. A number of leaders are relatively new to post, however, and this means that the impact of some improvement actions is yet to be fully realised. You are rightly focusing on further developing the leadership skills of your team so that aims can be realised.

Pupils say they enjoy coming to school and learning. They express pride in their own and others' achievements, showing tolerant and empathetic attitudes. Behaviour in and around the school is good. Pupils talk knowingly and with increasing confidence as they move through the school about the school's '6 Rs' approach. Becoming resourceful, reasoning, responsible, reflective, resilient and respectful citizens is the aim. Pupils show clear understanding of how these principles develop learning skills and foster positive relationships, preparing them well for later life.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Safeguarding practices are a strength of the school. Protecting children and keeping them safe and free from harm are central themes of its day-to-day work. This core purpose determined your decision to offer weekly swimming lessons for all pupils from Reception age onwards – a protective approach given the school's coastal location.

Leaders and governors ensure that efficient systems of safeguarding, including detailed logs and consistency in record keeping, are well organised and maintained. As a result, issues are quickly identified and swift action is taken where needed. By way of example, levels of attendance and punctuality are improving.

You ensure that staff and governors are highly aware of the most recent guidance and duties through regular training and by keeping policies strictly up to date. Staff and governors talk knowledgeably about their responsibilities regarding the 'Prevent' duty, for example, adopting appropriately vigilant attitudes regarding the protection and welfare of pupils.

Parents say teachers know and care about pupils as individuals. Strong relationships with families mean essential information is shared. Home, school and other agencies work in partnership to resolve concerns and manage needs. Parents describe staff as 'understanding', and several agree that concerns are responded to promptly, with the school helping children 'gain confidence'. Consequently, pupils say they feel safe at school. They are confident that adults will listen if something is worrying them.

## Inspection findings

- Leaders' and governors' commitment to continuous improvement is securing positive results. When issues arise, the correct priorities are addressed and immediate action is taken. For example, work to improve boys' interest and abilities in writing has been tackled robustly by the implementation of an enhanced curriculum. The use of one single book to capture writing across the curriculum means the quality of writing is more consistent across subjects. In making writing more attractive and meaningful to boys, by planning carefully tailored topics and offering exciting writing challenges, improvement is evident. By the end of key stage 1 in 2015, for example, boys reversed the national trend by outperforming girls in this subject.
- You monitor the quality of teaching and learning regularly. Careful checks by you and other leaders ensure that individual strengths and any development needs are identified and aired. Through scrutinising pupils' work, visiting lessons, talking to pupils and teachers about their learning, leaders have a secure grasp on precisely what is working well and what needs to improve. This swiftly leads to professional development opportunities being provided where appropriate, reliably meeting the needs of the school and staff. Teachers value the support and challenge that they are afforded in this manner. All staff are in agreement that the school is well led and managed by you.
- Systems that you have devised are capturing helpful information about the achievement of individuals and groups of pupils. Some assessment practices are not yet embedded, however, meaning progress measures are not yet used by the wider leadership team in a consistent manner. You feel strongly that assessment practices that shape and inform learning and teaching, rather than those that simply capture 'scores' and end results, are central to securing rapid progress. Because of this, leaders across the school regularly use pupils' work to discuss and gather information about the rate and extent of pupils' progress. From these findings, individual targets and precision teaching are put in place to support or challenge pupils.
- Pupils make good progress. From below typical starting points in the early years, pupils reach expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 1. This said, the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels in reading at the end of key stage 1 was lower than figures seen nationally.
- More recently, pupils are catching up rapidly, leaving Reception in line with others nationally. You and other leaders are aware of the extra challenge and raised expectations this signifies and have adapted aspects of teaching practice and improvement planning accordingly. New reading materials are offering key stage 2 pupils further opportunities to develop higher-level analytical skills. Plus, daily 'know, understand and apply' challenges for pupils demand greater depth of learning or mastery of skills. Both examples illustrate raised expectations and are beginning to make a difference.

- Pupils are happy and well looked after. They talk knowingly about the different forms that bullying takes and understand how this can affect others. They have a firm belief that teachers and other adults will intervene if there are problems. Pupils also strongly agree that teachers listen to them in lessons, help them to do their best and promote an enjoyment of learning. 'COW' time (correct our work) is seen by pupils as very helpful in allowing them regular time to learn from mistakes and discuss their learning with teaching staff.
- Governors are a regular presence in the school. Although several governors are fairly new to the role, their collective skills, knowledge and understanding about the workings of the school mean that you and other leaders are held strictly to account. They consistently challenge you and others to make further improvements. Governors understand recent guidance in terms of safeguarding and effectively support the school's work to keep pupils safe.
- The majority of parents speak very highly of the school and its leaders. In particular, there is a consensus of opinion that pupils are well looked after. Parents agree that pupils in the school are well behaved and that their children feel safe. The opportunity to visit the school's reward assemblies, each Friday, is greatly valued. A few parents disagree with the amount of homework pupils receive. However, others express positive views saying the homework is helpful in allowing them the opportunity to contribute to their child's learning, especially through the online systems the school offers.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- recently established leaders are further supported to develop the knowledge and skills needed to have rapid and substantial impact on improvement
- staff use the recently developed assessment system with consistency and rigour to accurately track the progress and attainment of pupils
- the teaching of reading improves to enable more pupils to reach the highest possible standards.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body 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 inspection, I discussed the work of the school with you, the deputy headteacher and other leaders. I met with seven members of the governing body, including the vice-chair of the governing body and spoke with a group of parents within the school grounds. I held a telephone conversation with your school improvement partner from the local authority. I talked with pupils informally at breaktimes and in classes during lessons. We visited all classes to observe teaching and learning, together, looking at pupils' work and dropping in to additional support sessions, across the school day. I examined policies and information posted on the school website. I also evaluated the work in pupils' books and scrutinised school information and documentation, such as records of the monitoring of teaching and learning. I took the views of parents, staff and pupils into account from their responses to questionnaires.