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Mr Calum Campbell
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Campbell

Short inspection of Bolton Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 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 November 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment you have won the confidence of parents, governors, staff and pupils. They find you approachable and know that you will always take time to listen to them.

Your small village school offers pupils a wealth of experiences, including outdoor adventurous activities, sporting opportunities and cultural events. You have worked with the school community to develop a shared vision for the school. Pupils, parents, staff and governors are proud of the school and share your commitment to 'caring, inspiring, enjoying, excelling'. You encourage the local community to be involved in the life of the school. Members of the local Mothers' Union listen to younger pupils read, residents have joined the governing body, and children and staff from the adjoining nursery joined in with your street party celebrating the Queen's 90th birthday.

Parents told me about how well prepared their older children have been for their move to secondary school. You keep in touch with former pupils to see how they get on. Pupils from Bolton Primary School have experienced numerous successes because they have been well prepared for their secondary education.

The previous inspection identified a few areas for the school to work on including improving the quality of provision in the early years outdoor area. You and your colleagues carefully considered how you could make best use of the space available. Children now have access to stimulating outdoor areas which give them good

opportunities to extend all aspects of their learning and promote their independence. As a result, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard by the end of early years is increasing. You have also created more opportunities for outdoor learning for all your pupils including the raised beds tended by the gardening club, the wild area, 'bug hotel' and storytelling chair.

Since the last inspection you have made some improvements to the teaching of mathematics. In early years, more children achieved at least the expected standard in numbers in 2015 and all children reached the expected standard in shape, space and measures. Your increased focus on your youngest pupils developing confidence and mental fluency in basic number skills is improving outcomes at the end of key stage 1. You have introduced more opportunities for pupils to be more actively involved in their learning through practical activities so that they are now making better progress across key stage 2. However, as we discussed, pupils' progress is sometimes hampered because teachers are not using the information they gather about pupils' learning as well as they could, to plan next steps. Also, teachers sometimes do not make timely decisions about when pupils are ready to move on to the next stage or be challenged to deepen their understanding.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements meet requirements. Systems to check the suitability of staff to work with children are robust. Staff have kept up to date with child protection training and understand their responsibilities for keeping pupils safe including the 'Prevent' duty. Parents, staff and pupils are in agreement that all pupils are safe and well cared for. Pupils say that bullying is rare and when it happens it is dealt with quickly. Pupils are confident to speak to an adult in school if they are worried about anything. You keep the gate from the car park into the playground locked during the school day so that pupils safely access school using the pedestrian entrance.

Inspection findings

- You have brought a 'breath of fresh air' to the school. You are absolutely committed to putting the pupils' best interests at the heart of your vision for the school. You met some resistance to a number of the changes you put in place but you have gained the confidence of the overwhelming majority of the parents, staff and governors who recognise the positive difference you are making.
- You have created a calm, purposeful, happy place in which to learn. You and your staff find out about what your pupils are interested in to make sure that you plan learning which will excite and engage them. You are creative in addressing the challenge of meeting curriculum requirements in your mixed-age classes. You make sure that you assiduously record the content covered by each cohort across all the subjects so that all pupils have a broad and balanced curriculum. However, we agreed that in some subjects, such as science, teachers need to make sure that they plan lessons which take into account the different requirements for each year group.

- You systematically track the attainment and progress of all your pupils across the school. You encourage your pupils and teachers to review learning regularly. Each term you and your teachers use a range of evidence to evaluate the progress of each pupil across a range of subjects. This information is shared with pupils and parents in a format that makes it easy to understand how well pupils are doing. You use this information well to identify pupils who are falling behind, making sure you put in place additional support as appropriate. We talked about how teachers and pupils can make even better use of the 'I can' tracking grids you have developed. You identified how teachers could update them 'on the spot' as they collect evidence of a pupil's learning, and use them to identify next steps which will then inform their lesson planning. Moreover, if pupils were given greater access to this information they could take greater responsibility for their own learning.
- The small numbers of pupils in each cohort mean that significant patterns and trends are hard to identify. However, it is clear that pupils make good progress and achieve well by the end of Reception in most aspects of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Children are achieving better outcomes in mathematics. The early years team is now addressing literacy as children perform less well in this aspect.
- The proportions of pupils achieving the expected standard in phonics (the sounds letters make) are improving. You have put additional, targeted support in place to help those pupils who were still working below age-related expectations at the end of key stage 1 to catch up quickly. Since the last inspection, most cohorts have made steady progress across key stage 2. Now, your older pupils are making better progress and almost all of them should at least meet the expected standard by the end of year 6.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in their improving attendance which is already above the national average. Pupils' responses to the online questionnaire were highly positive. All the parents I spoke to at the start of the school day told me that their children are happy at school.
- You have developed good local networks with other schools which help you and your staff to reflect on and improve the provision you offer. You are forward-looking, keeping up to date with changes in education and are keen to learn from proven good practice.
- You have a good understanding of your school's strengths and weaknesses. You interrogate the information about pupils' performance to inform your school's self-evaluation. You have quite rightly identified that there is further room for improvement in pupils' outcomes. When we looked at pupils' work together, we agreed the actions which you and your teachers need to take so that pupils make better progress in English, mathematics and science across the school.
- The new members of the governing body bring a wealth of experience, expertise and skills to their work. You provide governors with useful information which helps them challenge and support the school more effectively than in the past. The governing body has completed an audit of members' skills and used this information to identify areas for their own development. We talked about how you all need to agree on success criteria for each of the focus areas in your school improvement plan so that you and the governors are able to monitor how well you are doing. We discussed the importance of the success criteria being directly linked to pupils' outcomes. Governors are ensuring that the school complies with regulations regarding the publication of specified information on your website.

- You and your staff make sure that your pupils have access to a wealth of experiences during their time at Bolton Primary School. Parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and spoke to the inspector 'love the wide range of extra activities available', such as chess, knitting and animation. The pupils I spoke to told me about the range of sporting competitions pupils take part in, how they enjoy learning to play an instrument and take pleasure in their art lessons. The weekly 'What's going on in the world?' assembly lets you explore global issues with the pupils. You and your staff make good use of the physical education and sports funding, helping pupils achieve success in a number of local competitions.
- Parents are equally impressed with how well you meet the diverse range of pupils' needs. Parents of pupils who have special educational needs or disability described how pleased they are with the support their children are being given and the progress they are making. Equally, parents speak highly of how well you have settled their younger children into school as well as preparing their older children for secondary school.
- Pupils are well behaved. Visitors to school, as well as members of the public who see them out on trips, comment on how polite and courteous they are. They care deeply about each other and see Bolton Primary School as their 'second family'.
- You and the governing body are keen to involve parents in their children's learning. You have set up a games lending library so that pupils can borrow games to play at home with their family, which will help their learning. Parents told me how their children are enjoying accessing the online mathematics learning platform you have subscribed to, on which they complete the activities teachers set. Parents commented about how it is making a positive difference to their children's skills and enjoyment in this subject. Recently, you have invited members of the local Mothers' Union to come into school to hear the younger pupils read. You hope that this will make a difference to pupils' confidence, fluency and understanding in reading.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- ensure that teachers accelerate pupils' progress across the curriculum so that more pupils' achievement is at least in line with age-related expectations and many exceed this standard by:
 - using information about pupils' learning in a more timely way to move them on swiftly to the next stage or set them tasks which will deepen their understanding
 - making sure that across the curriculum learning is planned which takes into account the different requirements of each of the year groups in mixed-age classes
- establish measurable success criteria, which link directly to outcomes for pupils, for each of the focus areas in the school improvement plan so that you can accurately monitor the impact of your actions.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cumbria. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Pippa Jackson Maitland
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I spoke to you, members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority, a group of teaching and support staff, and a number of pupils. Together, you and I looked closely at the quality of work in pupils' books and scrutinised the school's assessment and tracking data. I spoke to parents at the start of the school day. I also considered the views of 24 pupils, 25 parents and six staff who completed online questionnaires. I reviewed your self-evaluation as well as a range of other documentation. I also checked the effectiveness of your safeguarding arrangements and recruitment information. I checked that the school meets the requirements regarding the publication of specified information on its website.