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Mrs E Stellmacher  
Headteacher  
St Bega's CofE Primary School  
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Cumbria  
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Dear Mrs Stellmacher

### **Short inspection of St Bega's CofE Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 10 May 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 May 2011.

### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. There have been significant changes in staffing recently, including your appointment as headteacher in September 2015. You have worked hard to ensure that new teaching staff have received appropriate support and challenge to get up to speed quickly with your high expectations. Governors, the local authority and local, experienced headteachers have provided a strong network of support during this period of change. Pupils enjoy a most welcoming and nurturing environment in which to learn. Staff know them all very well and work closely with parents and other agencies to make sure that pupils' needs are met well.

Staff feel very proud to work at the school and share your high expectations. Similarly, parents are overwhelmingly supportive. Every parent who offered an opinion during the inspection would recommend the school to others. As one parent stated, 'My child loves his school and it has been brilliant to see him flourish in such a positive, supported environment. His teachers really know him, understand his needs and support and stretch his learning. The school offers a range of additional clubs and activities and asks for our opinion and ideas around these. It's a fabulous small school in every way.' This is typical of the very positive comments made by parents.

At the previous inspection, the school was praised as a happy place, at the heart of the community, where pupils feel safe and enjoy learning. Current pupils confirmed that this area of strength has been maintained. They love coming to school and say that they are like 'one big family who look out for each other'. Pupils' behaviour was also praised and this remains a strength. In lessons, around school and outside, pupils' behaviour is exemplary.

The previous inspection report highlighted some areas for improvement. One area related to assessment. The inspector at that time found that better use could be made of assessment so that pupils could understand the next steps in their learning and that the tasks set for pupils consistently matched their needs. This aspect of your work is now stronger. You have a very good understanding of pupils' individual abilities and this helps teachers to plan activities which provide appropriate challenge. This is because you are establishing an effective system of assessment throughout the school which informs you of pupils' strengths and weaknesses in different subjects. We did discuss, however, that the new system needs further adjustment so that the progress made by different groups of pupils and different classes can be summarised more easily. This is an area of work which you and governors are currently finalising.

The previous report also highlighted improvements needed in pupils' writing. Specifically, more attention needed to be given to develop the basic competencies of writing and pupils required more opportunities to write in different subjects. Again you have addressed this aspect well. Skills such as handwriting are now addressed more consistently across the whole school and actions are making a difference. You make full use of the beautiful surroundings in the local area to help motivate pupils to write. Pupils' books also show that they have ample opportunities to write in different subjects, such as in history, geography and especially science. Examples of writing from key stage 2 homework tasks, for example when researching famous scientists, are particularly impressive and indicate why parents believe strongly that their children receive a good education.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Stringent checks are made on new members of staff to make sure that they are safe to work with children. Records are detailed and are of high quality. Policies to safeguard pupils are up to date and reflect the most recent government legislation. Leaders and governors also attend training to make sure they keep up to speed with safeguarding matters. Pupils are well aware of how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet. They all say that they feel safe in school and this view was supported by every parent who shared their views with me, either in person or through Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire).

### **Inspection findings**

- The governing body is well established and provides strong support and challenge. Governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school and work well alongside you to check that planned actions for improvement are

carried through. This is made possible because they attend meetings regularly and also complete individual visits to monitor the school in action. They are well aware of performance management procedures which support you and staff in your drive for improvement. Governors value the school's position at the heart of the local community and play a key role in organising events to bring the community together. You are looking forward to hosting a celebration of the Queen's 90th birthday, as well as hosting the annual Eskdale art festival, which helps to raise vital funds for the school. Governors are kept well informed through your termly headteacher's reports. They explained how, in meetings, they challenge you where performance might not seem as strong as it might be. I discussed with governors how their challenge in meetings could be better recorded. They are also aware that some minor pieces of information are currently missing from the school website.

- Teachers work hard to provide all pupils with tasks which challenge them appropriately. This is not easy because of the wide range of ages and abilities in the two classes. Pupils say that they complete the same work, for example when learning about the perimeter of shapes, but that the activities they complete are different, according to their abilities. This was confirmed by the work observed in pupils' books. In mathematics, pupils have many opportunities to practise their skills in mathematical fluency, using different calculations and developing their understanding of place value and number. We did discuss, however, that pupils could have more opportunities to broaden and deepen their knowledge by completing more activities which require them to reason about their thinking in solving mathematical problems.
- Your school improvement plan is a detailed document which covers all aspects of the school. It is revisited regularly and shared with governors so you can assess which actions have been completed and which still need to be. It is not clear from the plan what the main areas for improvement are. There is a tendency to seek improvement in all aspects of school, even where your provision is very strong, such as in pupils' behaviour. We discussed how future plans should focus on the key areas for improvement and how you could clarify more precisely what you are trying to achieve. We also discussed how you could check on progress at key points towards targets throughout the year.
- Pupils and parents are very appreciative of the school. Older pupils explained how they have been supported by staff to become better learners and how they help each other, both socially and academically. They value the fact that everyone gets along very well and that pupils go out of their way to involve everybody. They also value how staff work well together to help pupils succeed. They talked about their understanding of British values, including democracy, the rule of law and freedom of speech, and how they have enjoyed learning about different cultures and religions, as well as their own.
- Detailed records are kept on each child in the early years. Staff make observations of children's learning to highlight their strengths and needs and they use this information well to plan activities which help children to

progress. For example, to accelerate pupils' writing skills, there has been a focus on developing pupils' fine motor skills, which enables them to master more readily the skills of early mark-making and emergent writing.

- Pupils who need additional help with their learning are well supported. Detailed plans show what additional support is available for these pupils. Evidence seen in pupils' books shows clearly how well their needs are met.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- new assessment procedures are further refined so that the progress of different classes and groups of pupils can be summarised more easily
- school improvement planning is focused more specifically on key priorities and that progress towards intended targets can be more easily monitored.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Hardman  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you and three governors. I spoke with pupils informally, both in and outside of classrooms, and I also spoke with an adviser from the local authority. I considered a wide range of documentation including: the school's self-evaluation; school development plan; documents relating to safeguarding; minutes from governing body meetings and information relating to pupils' progress. I visited both classes, one together with you, to observe teaching, to speak with pupils about their learning and to check progress in books. I considered 12 responses to Ofsted's online 'Parent View' questionnaire and spoke to two parents who were dropping pupils off at school.