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Mrs Louise Fletcher
Headteacher
Swarland First School
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Dear Mrs Fletcher

Short inspection of Swarland First School

Following my visit to the school on 19 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 September 2010.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, other leaders and governors have high expectations of pupils in terms of learning and attainment. Together, you are actively securing improvements across the school. Since your appointment in September 2012, you have diligently and successfully tackled the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. Consequently, progress in the early years is improving, achievement in writing and mathematics across the school is rising steadily, and governors' strategic involvement in school matters has increased.

You have created a warm, positive ethos. Pupils are recognised and celebrated as individuals. Each pupil's interests and capabilities are of prime importance as you develop a creative curriculum to meet their collective needs. The views of pupils and parents, as well as staff, are seen as vital ingredients in shaping improvement planning to realise shared goals. In this way, an inclusive and nurturing environment in which all are invested has emerged.

Pupils are friendly, happy and get along well together. They are unfailingly polite and extremely respectful of adults. Pupils state with certainty that bullying does not happen in their school, and they are confident that any infrequent misbehaviour is dealt with firmly and fairly by adults. Pupils describe each other as kind and well-mannered. They are very proud of the 'buddies' who help them at

playtime, and younger pupils aspire to taking on this respected role as they move through the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your governors are vigilant and mindful of safeguarding requirements. Safeguarding checks on staff, volunteers and governors are rigorous. Professional development opportunities ensure that staff have up-to-date knowledge. Policies and practices are routinely updated. Recently, child protection and 'Prevent' duty training have equipped adults with appropriately attentive, informed attitudes regarding children's safety, well-being, and the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.

Logs and records of concern or incidents are detailed and well-maintained, meaning that you are able to identify and respond to trends or patterns in behaviour or any emerging issues. By way of example, attendance and punctuality are closely monitored. As a result, overall attendance sits above national averages, and isolated incidents of poorer attendance are dealt with promptly.

Staff are clear about their role and responsibilities regarding the welfare and protection of pupils. Pupils say that their school is a safe place, and parents are in complete agreement. Regular e-safety training and awareness helpfully alerts pupils and families to the positive power, as well as the dangers, of online activity. While this work is having a beneficial impact on pupils' ability to stay safe online, you and governors agree that, in this digital age of technology, work needs to remain ongoing and central to improvement planning to keep pace with developments in information and communication technology.

Inspection findings

- You work in partnership with other leaders to regularly monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school. Using classroom observations, discussions with staff and pupils, evaluation of the work in pupils' books and school assessment information, you skilfully acquire knowledge and understanding of where strengths, areas for development and priorities lie. You use this information to drive improvement. As a result, the quality of teaching continues to improve and good standards are maintained.
- Wider leadership roles are a growing strength of the school. In extending leadership and management duties, you are ensuring that all adults are effectively supported and challenged to secure good outcomes for pupils across subjects and key stages. Consequently, the proportion of children in the early years reaching good levels of development is improving year on year. In addition, a rising trend of improvement is evident in key stage 1. In 2015, key stage 1 pupils reached standards significantly above national averages in all subjects, with writing a particular strength. Occasionally, the most able pupils are not sufficiently challenged, meaning that the rate of progress for this group slows.
- You have developed a creative curriculum that aims to stimulate pupils' interest, capture their imagination and inspire them to practise and develop

new skills, as well as strengthen their existing capabilities. This means that pupils' behaviour in lessons is good and their attitudes to learning are positive. Similarly, this enriching of the curriculum is preparing pupils well for the next stage in their school career and for later life. The carefully planned topic of culture widens pupils' horizons effectively. You are, however, keen to further expand pupils' experiences of other cultures and ways of life. You and governors are highly aware of the benefits and potential limitations of the school's rural context in terms of preparing pupils fully for life in modern Britain.

- Governors are highly ambitious for the school and, more recently, show improved skill in holding leaders to account. They regularly visit the school to see for themselves its strengths and weaknesses. Governors meticulously interrogate school information, including your reports, about the progress made against improvement priorities. The changes you have made to assessment procedures this year, however, mean that details may be missed or misunderstood by governors. You are in agreement with governors that assessment information needs to be more easily understood and clearly communicated.
- Teachers have a well-developed understanding of how pupils learn and develop. Because of this, they carefully articulate the sounds that letters make, supporting pupils effectively to develop this early reading skill. This means that the proportion of pupils in Year 1 reaching the expected standard in the government's phonic screening test is consistently above national averages. Visits from authors and books bought to specifically capture the interest of different groups and abilities are generating greater enjoyment of reading among pupils. Reading takes place with a frequency designed to promote pleasure, fluency and comprehension, equipping pupils well with an essential set of life skills. All parents agree that pupils are well taught, and all would recommend the school to others.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most able pupils are consistently challenged to reach the highest standards of which they are capable
- school assessment information is easily understood and clearly communicated to enable a sharper, more precise focus on priorities.

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 inspection, I spent time with you discussing the effectiveness of the school, and its leadership and management. We jointly observed teaching, learning and assessment in all classes across the school. I scrutinised work in pupils' English, writing and mathematics books to consider the progress currently being made by pupils in all year groups. I reviewed school documentation and information, including policies, assessment information, monitoring files and your reports to the governing body. I met with governors, including the chair of the governing body, the early years leader with additional responsibility for special educational needs and the mathematics leader. I also held discussions with a representative from the local authority and a group of pupils. I took account of staff, pupil and parent responses in the online questionnaires and considered the school's own surveys.