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Mrs Sara Royle
Headteacher
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Bassenthwaite
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Dear Mrs Royle

Short inspection of Bassenthwaite Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 24 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 January 2011.

This school continues to be good.

Leaders and governors have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You provide effective and motivating leadership based on clear vision and high ambition for the pupils. All teachers have a leadership role and lead improvement successfully. Governors have a range of expertise and are well informed. They ask probing questions, so they have a good understanding of the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. By making the best use of everyone's skills, you have achieved your aim to provide pupils with 'exciting challenges and enriched experiences'. Pupils value the small class sizes and the fact that teachers know them very well. They proudly tell visitors about their 'small school, big opportunities'.

Engagement with parents is good. Many took the time to respond to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and all say their children are happy and well looked after. The overwhelming majority would recommend the school. The caring 'family ethos' is a feature referred to by many parents. A typical comment was: 'You know children will come out with a smile on their faces with lovely stories to tell about the exciting things they have been doing throughout their day.' Inspection findings endorse parents' positive views. There is an excellent atmosphere in school arising from positive relationships, pupils' enthusiasm for learning, and everyone's pride and joy in their achievements.

You have all dealt with most of the areas for improvement that were identified at the previous inspection successfully. Pupils find feedback on their work helpful. They know how well they are doing and how they can improve the quality of their work. Pupils of all ability make good progress. Children start in the early years with different experiences, knowledge and skills. They make good progress from their varied starting points because provision stimulates their curiosity and fills them with a love of learning. This good progress continues as pupils move through the school. Teaching in each class builds on their knowledge and skills in each subject and motivates them to do well and take pride in their achievements. Attainment in the standardised tests in Year 2 and Year 6 varies from year to year because cohorts are so small. The majority of pupils attained above-average standards in both Year 2 and Year 6 in 2015. Attainment is lower this year (2016) in Year 2, but pupils have nevertheless made good progress from their starting points.

You have ensured that pupils have varied opportunities to develop their awareness of the diversity of society in modern Britain. Pupils learn about different faiths and cultures in many different subjects. Your introduction of a topic on 'modern Britain' enables them to explore the values underpinning our society. They learn about life in different contexts through their correspondence with children in Paris and Guernsey and their fundraising for schools in Malawi and India.

There are a few aspects that require further improvement. Pupils' achievement in writing is good but lags behind their achievement in mathematics and reading. This is because pupils' spelling skills and handwriting have not kept pace with their good vocabulary and knowledge of different styles of writing. There are also times when teachers do not have high enough expectations for the quality and presentation of pupils' work. The most able pupils make good progress over time and attain standards that are securely at, or exceed, those expected for their age. There are times, however, when the most able pupils would welcome more challenge in lessons, particularly in mathematics.

Effective leadership and governance make sure that the school keeps developing. The expansion of provision to include three-year-olds in 2014 has benefited children, the school and the community. Pupils receive a broad, relevant and stimulating education. Your careful planning makes sure that all pupils in the mixed-age classes cover the knowledge and skills outlined in the national curriculum in all subjects over time. You have developed effective systems to assess pupils' progress and inform the next steps in teaching. The outstanding aspects of the school's provision identified at the previous inspection have been sustained. Pupils' behaviour and safety, the development of their spiritual, moral and social skills, and their care, guidance and support are still key strengths. There is good capacity to improve the school further.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Pupils' safety and welfare are of paramount importance to everyone. Appropriate checks are made when staff are recruited, and policies are up to date and are applied consistently. The school site is safe and risk assessments are thorough. Staff and governors have attended training appropriate to their role. They are aware of what they should do to help keep children safe, including from risks associated with extremism and online bullying and grooming.

Pupils feel and are safe in school. Their attendance is consistently good. Their behaviour towards each other is exemplary: they show consideration and respect for each other. Incidents of poor behaviour or bullying have been unknown in the last five years. The older pupils look after the younger ones when they play out and pupils of all ages work together constructively. In the words of one parent: 'The opportunities to mix with children of all ages helps them develop excellent social skills.'

Inspection findings

- All staff and governors share your ambition and vision for the school. The school continues to improve because you all have an in-depth understanding of the strengths and aspects requiring further development. You all work in close collaboration to achieve your goals.
- Improvement planning is thorough and takes account of national priorities, such as the 'Prevent' duty, as well as specific needs in school. The actions taken to date have had a positive impact. However, the plans themselves do not make it clear that you check actions are proceeding as planned or how impact of actions will be evaluated.
- You manage the performance of staff effectively and morale is high. They are proud to work at the school, are highly motivated and feel trusted to use their initiative. Teachers are keen to use and develop their expertise, for example by attending relevant training.
- Parents have a high level of confidence in all who work at the school. Typical comments include: 'Teachers are friendly, helpful and approachable' and 'The school is a well-run organisation where everyone works together efficiently.' A very small minority feel that the information received about pupils' progress and behaviour is not good enough.
- Governors are knowledgeable about national developments as well as the school's priorities. The website meets all requirements. Governors make sure that all policies are up to date and additional sports funding is used effectively to broaden pupils' experiences and develop teachers' skills. There is no additional funding allocated to the school at this time to support disadvantaged pupils.

- Children settle happily and get off to a good start when they join the school in the Nursery or Reception Year. The early years provision is stimulating, both indoors and outdoors. Children have fun investigating and exploring the many exciting activities. They make good progress in all areas of learning.
- Teachers know the pupils very well. They are attuned to pupils' interests and build on their knowledge and understanding effectively in all subjects as they move through the school.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability are well supported. They make good progress in their learning and excellent gains in their personal, social and emotional development. The special educational needs leader tracks their progress carefully. She makes good use of external expertise, such as a range of consultants and speech and language therapists, to enhance provision.
- Assessment is used effectively by all staff to track pupils' progress and identify the next steps in their learning. Teachers have been using assessment linked to national curriculum expectations for pupils' ages for the last two years in reading, writing and mathematics. They make sure that pupils develop their knowledge and skills effectively over time within all subjects.
- Reading skills, including phonics, are taught effectively from the early years onwards. Mathematical skills are developed consistently well and pupils are given many opportunities to investigate and use reasoning skills. Writing is developed across all subjects so pupils have a good understanding of how to write for different purposes. However, their spelling and handwriting are not as well developed as their vocabulary and grammatical knowledge.
- The curriculum is planned with care to make sure that pupils' knowledge and skills develop systematically in all subjects, including French, sciences, technology, arts and humanities, in the mixed-age classes. They participate in a wide range of physical activities, including water sports, team games and outdoor pursuits.
- The cross-curricular approach is popular and creates memorable learning experiences for pupils. For example, pupils spoke with enthusiasm about the topic on Brazil, especially the music and dance. Pupils learn French from Reception Year onwards and are extremely enthusiastic about it. Pupils love the increased opportunities they have to pursue their own interests. They have shown creativity and resourcefulness in researching and presenting their findings on their chosen topics.
- Pupils' experiences are enriched with many additional activities, including outdoor learning. All pupils learn to play a brass instrument and many play another instrument as well. Participation in after-school clubs is wide-ranging. Pupils regularly enjoy choir, sports, gardening and film club.

- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is developed very effectively. They are curious and reflective, with very well-developed social skills. They make a good contribution to the local community, have a good understanding of global events and issues, and show respect for people from different backgrounds.
- Pupils make an excellent contribution to the school through their positive attitudes to learning, their exemplary conduct and considerate behaviour towards each other. Many pupils enjoy taking responsibility, for example as school councillors.
- Pupils' excellent social skills, well-developed literacy and mathematical skills, and self-motivation prepare them well for the next stage of their education. Constructive links with the secondary school, Keswick School, support their smooth transition.
- Partnership working within the 'Keswick cluster' is developing but is at an early stage. The existing links support the sharing of good practice between your school and two similar schools. You are keen to develop these partnerships further.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers support pupils to develop their spelling and handwriting skills systematically over time, and have consistently high expectations for pupils' presentation of their work
- the most able pupils are provided with more activities, problems or investigations that deepen their understanding and challenge their thinking, especially in mathematics
- everyone knows how progress with improvement plans will be checked and how the impact of actions will be evaluated.

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

Jean Olsson-Law
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I had meetings with you, two members of staff and three governors including the chair. I spoke to the local authority adviser by telephone. I visited all classes with you, where I observed teaching and learning, looked at pupils' work and spoke to pupils. I met with six pupils from key stage 2 and spoke to others during break times. I spoke with parents as

they dropped their children off at school and took account of 15 responses to Parent View. I also took account of seven responses to the online questionnaire from staff. I looked at information about pupils' progress and attainment and at your self-evaluation and action planning. I evaluated safeguarding procedures, including policies to keep children safe and records of training, safeguarding checks and behaviour management.