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Mrs Janet Forth
Headteacher
Skirlaugh Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School
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Dear Mrs Forth

Short inspection of Skirlaugh Church of England Voluntary Controlled 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 February 2011.

This school continues to be good.

You have shown determination and resilience in tackling some of the challenges posed by staffing turbulence over the last two years. You have acted on advice from the local authority and have been successfully supported by the Ebor academy trust to rapidly improve practice in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school. You are rigorous in setting targets for teachers, ensuring these are measureable and focused on raising the attainment of pupils. You and your leadership team use a range of information to accurately determine the quality of teaching as good. As a result, all groups of pupils continue to make good progress.

Governors have a strong working knowledge of the strengths of the school and are reflective about areas still to be improved. There is evidence of deep questioning and persistent challenge to leaders through committees in particular. You provide high-quality information to governors, particularly on the attainment and progress of pupils, allowing governors to fully understand the effectiveness of the school.

Pupils' behaviour is a strength. Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the school values of forgiveness, friendship, perseverance and responsibility. Pupils' attendance is in line with that seen nationally.

Safeguarding is effective.

Policies and the records relating to checks on adults are well ordered and regularly updated. Staff take care to manage risks effectively for pupils in all aspects of school life, while encouraging adventurous play and hands-on activities, helping pupils to learn quickly. Staff have received recent and relevant training to help them identify and support vulnerable pupils, including those in danger of radicalisation.

Inspection findings

- Children generally enter your school with skills and abilities typical for their age. However, in recent years significant proportions of children have entered school during Reception or key stage 1 at levels of development lower than typically seen.
- There are fewer pupils than average for whom the school receives pupil premium grant, but above-average proportions are receiving support for special educational needs or disability. The relatively small size of the school makes comparisons with national figures challenging, as each pupil within a year group represents a large percentage. Even so, by the end of key stage 2, the attainment of pupils compares favourably to pupils of the same age nationally in reading and writing, and broadly in line in mathematics.
- Current assessment information shows that proportions of girls working at levels expected for their age are higher than might be expected, but for boys the picture is reversed, with lower numbers of boys at age-related levels. This is because more boys are receiving support for special educational needs or disability. Almost all pupils are making expected progress, with many making even better progress than might be expected.
- An area for improvement identified at the last inspection was to work more effectively with parents to convey high expectations. Parents now have considerable opportunities to work alongside their children and to take part in 'stay and read' sessions, for example. Leaders are helping parents to understand how they can help their children, such as through home-reading bookmarks, clearly showing what is expected of pupils by the end of each year in school. The school's own questionnaire to parents shows high levels of satisfaction with the school's work. A small number of parents responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, and the vast majority were happy with the school's work. An analysis of both questionnaires shows an improvement in the way leaders communicate and work with parents.
- Teachers are planning sequences of lessons to deepen pupils' learning, at the same time encouraging the application of literacy and numeracy skills across the whole curriculum.
- Pupils experience a rich curriculum. The teaching of science is enhanced through frequent opportunities to learn first-hand, often out in the school grounds. Regular homework is helping pupils to practise new skills and to secure their understanding in reading, spelling and basic mathematics.

- Teachers' consistent application of the school's marking policy is helping pupils to improve their work. Feedback is both encouraging and developmental and the impact on improved spellings and punctuation is clear to see. However, not all teachers demonstrate consistently high expectations of how pupils will present their work, sometimes leading to pupils' messy presentation and poor handwriting.
- Leaders in the early years have created an inviting and stimulating environment, conducive to exploration and learning. This is particularly true of the outdoor environment where children can explore and develop their knowledge and understanding of the world without interruption. Children's engagement in their learning has improved, increasing the proportion of children expected to reach typical levels of development to above national averages this year.
- Staff in the early years regularly observe children, using the information gathered to determine what learning should be planned for in the coming week. However, this is not consistently leading to rapid progress for some children because planned activities do not sufficiently develop the skills of those at risk of falling behind, particularly in phonics (letters and the sounds that they make), reading and writing.
- There was a drop in the proportion of pupils achieving the expected level in phonics in Year 1 in 2015. You identified the reasons for this and made considerable changes to the way phonics is taught. Consequently, the very effective use of additional adults is now helping pupils to make more rapid progress than in the past. As a result, the proportion on track to reach the expected standard is in line with most recent national data, and represents a considerable improvement over a three-year period.
- You and your staff have overhauled the way that writing is taught. Additional adults now play a much greater role in the modelling of writing, carefully guiding pupils' talk and helping them to structure their ideas. Work in books shows this is resulting in writing of a higher quality as pupils have progressed through the year.
- The last inspection identified mathematics as an area for development. Current school assessment information shows that pupils are generally making good progress and the most able pupils are making better progress than might be expected in mathematics. The proportions of pupils achieving levels expected for their age are higher than in reading and writing because several pupils who have special educational needs or disability are achieving well in mathematics.
- Teachers offer pupils opportunities to use and apply the mathematical skills they have learned in other areas of the curriculum. For example, during a study of the Great Fire of London, Year 2 pupils used their knowledge of division to find out how many boats would be needed to 'save' stranded people from the banks of the Thames.
- Leaders hold regular meetings with teachers to look in detail at the needs of individual pupils. Precise records and careful planning are resulting in almost all pupils with special educational needs and disability making good progress. Those pupils who are looked after are closely observed and are also making good progress. Additional adults

are working very effectively to support both groups of pupils with reading, writing and mathematics. However, gaps between these pupils and others in school are wide.

Next steps for the school

In order to prevent a decline in outcomes at the next inspection, leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- provision in the early years promotes more rapid progress for children, particularly in phonics, reading and writing, to ensure they get off to a good start in Year 1
- staff have high expectations of what all pupils, but particularly the least able and those with special educational needs and disability, will achieve in order to close the gap between this group of pupils and others
- expectation of the quality of written work that pupils will produce is increased, including improving handwriting and presentation.

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

Yours sincerely

Lesley Butcher

Her Majesty's Inspector