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Mr Christopher Steele
Headteacher
Crosscanonby St John's CofE School
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Dear Mr Steele

Short inspection of Crosscanonby St John's CofE School

Following my visit to the school on 12 October 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 June 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Since beginning your headship in January of this year, you have made considerable improvements to a wide range of aspects of the school. You have achieved this success quickly because you evaluate accurately, take time to reflect, and approach problem-solving with intelligence, taking care to ensure that everyone involved is well informed. Pupils and parents are fully supportive of the improvements you have made. Parents' views can be summed up by one parent who said that you had 'brought a sense of modernity' to the school. Pupils feel valued and are keen to comment on the improved environment, including toilet and washing facilities.

Teaching of phonics was not effective at the time of the previous inspection. In 2015, no pupils in Year 1 reached the expected standard in the phonics check. On taking up your post you addressed this weakness quickly and decisively, enabling those pupils to catch up quickly. In 2016, the Year 1 pupils were much more successful at the first time of taking the test.

Achievement in mathematics by the end of key stage 2 has, for some time, not been quite as strong as reading and writing. Improvement in mathematics was an area identified for improvement at the last inspection. The teaching of mathematics has been a focus for improvement and it is now improving quickly. You have

introduced fresh ideas on how teachers can teach mathematics, including the use of internet-based learning and tablets.

You have developed a very effective system to monitor the progress that pupils make more frequently. This enables you to identify which pupils are dropping off the pace and you can intervene immediately to ensure that these pupils catch up quickly. The process is also very helpful in monitoring how well different subjects and classes perform.

Despite considerable change in the school, you have ensured that the aspects that have been strengths of the school for some time have continued to be strong. Pupils still learn to read and write well. Pupils' personal development is a real strength of their education. They have highly positive attitudes to their learning and behave very well.

The governors provide you with good support. They are keen to improve themselves and are undertaking an evaluation of their skills and procedures. Governors played a considerable role in improving the provision for children in Reception, another area for improvement identified at the last inspection. Provision in the early years is good. The introduction of a Nursery is another good addition to the school and beneficial to the community.

Safeguarding is effective.

Your highly professional and systematic approach to safeguarding ensures that children, including the most vulnerable, are safe while in your charge. You are resolute in ensuring that other agencies fulfil their responsibilities promptly and professionally. All pupils feel safe and secure. Parents, too, believe their children are very well looked after. All staff play an important and effective role in ensuring that children are safe. They are well trained and care about pupils' well-being.

You back up your caring approach to safeguarding with systematic procedures and thorough record-keeping. Systems to ensure that only suitable staff are recruited are secure.

Pupils are taught well how to stay safe in a wide range of situations. They know how to use the internet safely. They play well together and are confident that they could turn to an adult if they had any concerns about themselves or a fellow pupil.

Inspection findings

- For this small school, annual published information on attainment and progress is statistically unreliable. The number of pupils in each year can be very small. This could lead to large swings in proportions of pupils appearing to be successful, or otherwise.
- Children get off to a good start in the early years class. Children's rates of development are accelerated by good teaching and support. In the past, progress has been slower across key stage 1. However, you and governors

identified this and implemented effective changes to the structure of groups for younger pupils and children. Pupils in key stage 1 now make much better progress. In key stage 2, pupils continue to do well, particularly in writing and reading. The introduction of improved and systematic phonics teaching is beginning to help pupils across all year groups improve their reading and spelling. A whole-school systematic approach to the teaching of mathematics has not yet been successfully introduced. Consequently, there is some variation in how pupils are taught to calculate, for example.

- Pupils from different starting points all progress well and current pupils are typically making good progress. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are very well supported and their progress is strong. Teachers know the strengths and weaknesses of every pupil in their class and so know how to help them. Most-able pupils make good progress. However, this is not as consistently good as other ability groups because teachers do not always provide these pupils with suitably challenging work. Your introduction of more aspirational targets for the most able pupils gives teachers a clear indication of what these pupils are expected to achieve.
- You have started to broaden pupils' experiences when learning mathematics. Pupils describe how they enjoy using modern technologies to improve their mathematics. The introduction of a scheme to help pupils learn their number bonds more securely and improve their mental arithmetic skills is very effective. However, pupils are not getting enough opportunities to apply their learning in a wide range of problem-solving activities, helping them to gain a greater understanding of mathematics and to develop their confidence.
- The improvements you have introduced to the way teachers mark pupils' work and give them advice are more strongly established in English. In mathematics, teachers' comments are not yet precise enough to help pupils fully understand what they have to do to improve.
- Pupils' personal development has been a well-established strength of the school. They receive a broad range of spiritual, moral, cultural and social experiences. Pupils are very knowledgeable about different religions and beliefs. From the first day children enter the school, they are encouraged to understand that people are different, to value difference and show respect through understanding.
- Pupils talk very enthusiastically about school residential and other educational visits where their personal qualities are developed further.
- Behaviour around the school is very good. Pupils are calm and courteous. In lessons, they focus well and enjoy their learning.
- Pupils' attendance is improving. Once again, headline information can be misleading as it only takes one or two pupils' attendance to deteriorate to affect whole-school figures significantly. You and your staff know the circumstances of every pupil and your team responds quickly when there are concerns about a pupil's attendance.
- Governors share your passion to improve this school still further. They have begun to evaluate how effectively they work and recognise that they can improve how rigorously they challenge you and hold you accountable for the progress pupils make. Their support is very good because they want the

best for the pupils in the school, have a diverse range of useful skills and have very strong links with the community.

- It is typical of your reflective and professional approach that you have looked beyond the governors to provide you with additional guidance and support. You have benefited from working with local school clusters and from the support of the local authority.
- The remodelled school website gives parents, children and the community a very effective insight into the school. It celebrates the wide range of children's achievements. It provides important information, too. It is an effective communication tool. However, it does not include some statutorily required information. You have the current documentation and you are in the process of having the website updated.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the improvement of pupils' achievement in mathematics across the school continues, by:
 - pupils applying consistent approaches and methods to calculations, throughout the school
 - pupils' opportunities to apply their mathematical skills in different contexts being broadened and extended
 - teachers continuing to improve their skills in how they help pupils improve, through marking and feedback.
- the school website provides all statutory required information.

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

Neil Mackenzie
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- Much inspection activity focused on how well:
 - mathematics and phonics are being taught
 - pupils, including different groups, achieve across all subjects
 - pupils are protected
 - pupils attend school.
- I considered the breadth of pupils' experiences and the extent of their personal development.

- In addition, I considered to what extent all levels of leadership have sufficient capacity to improve the school further.

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, a group of pupils, and three members of the governing body. I met a group of teachers and teaching assistants. I met a representative of the local authority. Documents were scrutinised, including: safeguarding checks, tracking of pupil's achievement and records of checks on the quality of teaching. I also visited classrooms with you to speak to pupils, look at their books and observe their learning. I examined child protection information. I spoke to six parents before the start of school and took account of nine written parental comments.