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Mrs Kath Mitchell
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Dear Mrs Mitchell

Short inspection of Cumwhinton School, Carlisle

Following my visit to the school on 16 November 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 March 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The strong, focused leadership you have brought to Cumwhinton School since the arrival of both yourself and your deputy headteacher as permanent appointments in September 2016 has enhanced an already happy school. It has ensured that the good quality of education reported at the last inspection remains the case now. In fact, such is the buzz you have brought, parents, pupils, staff and governors are right behind you in your vision to get the school to be outstanding. After a period of change in which the two interim headteachers before you supported and challenged the school well, through sharpening assessments for example, you have rightly not 'thrown out the baby with the bathwater'. Instead, you have evaluated carefully what has worked well and built on the work of your predecessors. Your clarity of thought and strong communication skills have raised expectations of what pupils, regardless of ability, should do. Likewise, the support and challenge provided by your governing body throughout this period of change have kept the school's focus firmly on its pupils.

Following the inspection of March 2012, leaders were asked to build on the existing inventive and thought-provoking practice evident in the school. They were also asked to make certain that open-ended and challenging questioning was continually used by all staff, and make the most of interesting curriculum experiences. Success in all these areas is evident in abundance. Pupils thoroughly enjoy their learning, be it practising writing letters in sand or cursive handwriting in Year 1, articulating ghostly personification in Year 6, plotting how 'Roger Rock' turns from stone to soil through weathering and erosion in Year 3, or using two-dimensional shapes to make

aliens in the Reception class. Good-quality questioning and prompting by teachers and their assistants help pupils to work out answers and correct their own work, writing the letter 'j' correctly, for example, where it was reversed beforehand. Most striking in the school, and a key contributory factor in helping the pupils make good progress, is the quality of the school environment. Vibrant, colourful displays welcome in pupils and encourage them to want to learn and to do their best. This is evident in pupils' real sense of keenness and pride to produce work for displays, about Black History Month for example, and for their 'Wonderful Work' books. Parents and pupils who contributed to this inspection were highly complimentary of your work to make the school environment so welcoming. They are right to be so, and your staff deserve much credit for the efforts made.

You are not complacent; neither are your leaders, staff or governors. You are well aware that outcomes for pupils in 2016 were mixed, particularly for pupils of middle ability. You have undertaken a thorough analysis of the results of tests and teacher assessments and have raised the bar so that all adults in the school have the highest expectations of pupils. Consequently, you do not expect just the most able pupils to be challenged in their learning, you expect all pupils to be so. Success with this high level of expectation is evident in the quality of work produced by current pupils most of the time. As we discussed, on occasion that high level of challenge slips. It is clear to me, though, that as headteacher you, along with your leadership team and governing body, know Cumwhinton School well. It is little wonder that comments made by parents were so positive. As one said, summing up, 'I am really thrilled with the school.'

Safeguarding is effective.

A strong culture of safeguarding permeates the school. All pupils who contributed to this inspection reported that they felt safe. Clear signs in the office and around the school make clear to all that the responsibility for ensuring pupils are safeguarded is everyone's. Around the school there are displays making pupils aware of how to keep safe, when using the internet for example, and promoting anti-bullying. Signage also clearly proclaims the school as 'nut free'.

Training for staff is up to date. Likewise, the school's policies and information, including helpful leaflets to parents on the school's website, take into account the requirements of 'Keeping children safe in education' 2016. Consequently, you and your leaders, including governors, have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of a high quality.

Inspection findings

- Your permanent appointment, alongside that of your deputy, has brought a sense of stability to the school. Parents, pupils and governors were unanimous in their praise of what you have brought to the community in such a short period of time. Their praise is justified. That is not to impugn the work of the interim headteachers. On the contrary, they, like you, did not let the school stand still. Governors proved themselves the school's anchor in this time, ensuring leaders

were held to account and pupils remained at the heart of the school's work.

- The local authority also played an important part during this period. It provided challenge and practical support, not least in securing the services of the interim headteachers.
- Since the previous inspection pupils by the end of Year 2 have enjoyed attainment that has been generally above average. Pupils leaving at the end of Year 6 saw levels of attainment rise from 2013 to 2015 overall. In addition, children in the early years have attained a good level of development, higher than the national average, for a number of years. Likewise, the proportion of pupils in Year 1 attaining the expected standard in phonics has also been above average.
- As we agreed, the progress made by Year 2 and Year 6 pupils in 2016 was mixed. You, your leadership team and your governing body undertook a thorough analysis to identify reasons why. Consequently, you have raised expectations and put into place a range of appropriate plans and interventions which are already paying dividends. Current pupils in the school, including in the early years, are making good progress in English and mathematics and across the curriculum.
- Pupils have the opportunity to put into practice their writing skills across the curriculum and do so successfully. They produce, for example, interesting pieces of writing about 'twirling leaves' or 'Devastating Desmond' (the storm that hit Cumbria in 2015) that grab and keep the interest of the reader. They also deepen their understanding of mathematics. In Year 2, for example, pupils are encouraged to test out the properties of shapes while older pupils successfully calculate areas of shapes, even though scales and measurements are not always provided.
- The joy of reading is promoted across the school. Books and materials appeal to boys and girls alike. Pupils clearly enjoy and value reading. Year 5 pupils, for example, quickly settled down following their rugby lesson and set about their books with enthusiasm. You recognise that more non-fiction material would broaden pupils' reading repertoire and have ordered a wider range of books to facilitate this. Classroom environments draw pupils to books: in Year 4, the 'reading wigwam' tempts pupils in to read with comfy cushions. Younger pupils use their phonic knowledge to work out how words are said. Such is the culture of expectation you have established that pupils who struggle with some words in their books are always determined to 'have a go' to achieve success. Reading records are detailed and form a good link between home and school.
- Overall, pupils regardless of ability are challenged to do their best. On occasion, though, this level of challenge slips. However, your tracking of pupils and the work in books show that pupils are making good progress across the curriculum. Disadvantaged pupils, the disadvantaged most able pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities also make good progress in their learning and development. This is because leaders responsible for these areas have ensured that such pupils have targets appropriate to their needs.
- The skills and abilities of children in the early years and pupils in Years 1 to 6 are

known well to you, your leaders and your staff. Teachers use this information to good effect in their planning, teaching and assessment.

- Ongoing assessment, through marking for example, provides pupils with helpful guidance on how to improve their work. However, as we agreed, the practice of allowing one pupil to check the work of another pupil in mathematics, while part of the school's policy, has the potential if overused to miss misconceptions or strengths.
- The curriculum, including in the early years, is interesting and brought to life through vibrant displays. Together with extra-curricular activity in music, sport and art for example, it promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. The Art Club, for example, created thoughtful pieces of work about remembrance based on the work of Georgia O'Keeffe. All in all, the whole school environment with its interactive displays is used well as a resource for teaching and contributes strongly to the good progress pupils make in their learning and development.
- Pupils behave well and are a credit to the school. They are polite, well-mannered, keen, eager to do their best and, according to those who spoke to me, they enjoy their homework. They are proud to live out the 'Cumwhinton values' of respect, responsibility, citizenship, trustworthiness and fairness. Such attributes and values, coupled with the interesting work they undertake in school, mean pupils are prepared well and understand what it is to be a good citizen in Britain today.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the level of challenge given to all pupils, regardless of ability, remains constant
- the potential for misconceptions or strengths being missed in mathematics through pupils checking each other's work is reduced.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for Cumbria and the regional schools commissioner.

Yours sincerely

Mark Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection I met with you, senior leaders, and three members of the governing body. I was also able to speak to a representative of the local authority. You, your deputy and I visited all classes to observe learning and look at work in pupils' books. I met with pupils throughout the day and spoke with five parents at the school gates. I took into account 29 free text comments made by parents. I also considered the 16 responses to the online staff questionnaire and 34 responses to the pupil questionnaire. I also scrutinised a range of documentation including that relating to assessment information, school improvement planning, behaviour and attendance logs, a number of case studies, the single central record and other safeguarding procedures and practices.

I considered in detail a number of questions:

- How good are outcomes for current pupils in the school? In answering this question I considered:
 - how well different groups of pupils make progress from their different starting points across the curriculum and especially in reading, writing and mathematics
 - whether all pupils are challenged to do their best.
- How effectively have leaders over time built on strengths in teaching identified the previous report?
- How effectively have leaders at all levels, including governors, managed the changes that have occurred in leadership in recent years?
- Do behaviour and safety remain as key strengths of the school?