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Mrs Dorothy Parry
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Parry

Short inspection of Ebchester CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 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 October 2011.

This school continues to be good.

Since the last inspection, you have provided dedicated and insightful leadership which has ensured that the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes have continued to improve. More recently, the assistant headteacher has benefited from working alongside you in a part-time acting headteacher role. This has strengthened leadership capacity and provided opportunities for developing the school's future leadership arrangements. Along with the assistant headteacher, you have accurately identified the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. These are clearly outlined in the school's self-evaluation and development plan. Governors check regularly that this plan is improving outcomes for your pupils. The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You and your staff have created an inclusive, harmonious and friendly school. Pupils feel safe, grow in confidence, and develop good learning behaviours. Pupils' behaviour during the inspection was exemplary. Equally, you, your staff and governors set high expectations and aspire to help all pupils achieve the very best outcomes. Pupils make at least good progress due to high-quality teaching and the prompt support provided if there are any signs that their progress is stalling.

The school has successfully tackled the two areas identified for improvement at the previous inspection. Firstly, carefully planned actions have improved the quality of teaching over time in the early years provision. Improvements in the quality and organisation of resources have enhanced learning opportunities in the classroom

and outdoors. As a result, children make good progress from their starting points and most are now well prepared for starting Year 1. Analysis of children's outcomes over time shows that there is further work to be done to improve the proportion of boys who achieve a good level of development.

The second area to address, to further accelerate pupils' progress and raise their attainment to higher levels, has also been tackled. In 2016, provisional data suggests that the proportions of Year 6 pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, achieving above the expected standard were higher than those found nationally. Similarly, by the end of key stage 1, a greater proportion of pupils achieved the higher standards in reading and mathematics, while the proportions working at greater depth in writing were close to the provisional national average. You and your governors have a detailed plan in place to further improve the numbers of pupils working at greater depth in writing.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, your staff and governors give the highest priority to keeping pupils safe. Leaders and governors have ensured that current safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are of a high quality. Careful safeguarding checks are carried out for all staff, governors and volunteers. Staff and governors receive regular and appropriate training so they know how to keep pupils safe, including recent training about how to protect pupils from radicalisation and extremism.

Pupils are well taught about how to keep themselves safe, including when they are online. They have a good understanding of the different forms that bullying can take and know that staff will help them if they ever have concerns. Pupils say that incidents of bullying are rare in their school. The school's records show that incidents of misbehaviour and bullying are infrequent and that these are thoroughly addressed by the staff. Pupils, parents and staff agree that the school is a safe place to be.

Inspection findings

- You have a good understanding of the learning and personal development needs of pupils in your school. You use your detailed assessment system well to keep a careful check on pupils' progress. Along with the assistant headteacher, you take prompt action to provide support for any pupils where their progress dips. As a result, pupils' progress from their starting points is good across the school.
- The introduction of shared leadership arrangements, with you working on a part-time basis alongside the assistant headteacher in a part-time acting headteacher role, is proving effective in building leadership capacity. Local authority leadership development for the assistant headteacher has also helped develop her skills.

- Governors have a good understanding of the strengths and priorities for the school. They provide leaders with an effective balance of challenge and support. For example, governors make effective use of national research findings in order to ensure that leaders are making the best use of the pupil premium funding. Governors' approach to the appointment of a headteacher designate, in preparation for your forthcoming retirement, has been carefully thought through and rigorously completed.
- You have in place very thorough systems for checking the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Findings from this monitoring are well used to plan training that continuously improves the quality of teaching across the school. Teachers new to the school are provided with suitable support from the assistant headteacher. This helps them to make an effective start to teaching in your school.
- The assistant headteacher provides effective leadership in mathematics. This has brought about good improvements in the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes in this subject. There are now greater opportunities for pupils to develop and apply their problem-solving and reasoning skills.
- Your focused efforts to improve writing outcomes are having a positive impact. By the end of key stage 2, all pupils make progress broadly in line with that found nationally, and many make better progress. The use of good-quality texts is stimulating pupils' interest in literature and providing useful models to improve their writing.
- Pupils make good progress in reading across the school. By Year 6, pupils across a range of abilities can read texts with confidence and good levels of comprehension.
- The proportion of Year 6 pupils achieving the expected level in grammar, punctuation and spelling is higher than that found nationally. However, the average mark achieved by Year 6 pupils in the spelling assessment was slightly below the provisional national figure in 2016. You and your staff have responded promptly to this by increasing the regularity of lessons and range of approaches used to teach spelling. As a result, pupils are working hard to improve their spelling skills.
- The proportion of children starting Reception with skills and abilities that are typical for their age is variable year on year. Nevertheless, children make good progress from their starting points and they are generally well prepared to start Year 1. Where children do not achieve a good level of development by the end of the early years, well-planned provision is in place to support their learning in Year 1. Over the last three years, boys' achievement has lagged behind that of girls. You recognise this pattern and are beginning to take steps, such as introducing activities that are more motivating for boys, to bring boys' achievement levels up to those of girls.
- High staff expectations, a caring atmosphere and responsible roles for pupils around school effectively develop pupils' personal and social skills. As a result, pupils' behaviour in lessons and at playtimes is exemplary. They work hard, are kind and supportive to their peers and display very good manners.

- Overall, your school attendance levels are similar to those found nationally. You, your staff and governors rigorously monitor pupils' attendance levels. Wherever pupil absence levels are a concern, you take prompt action to provide guidance and support for pupils and their families. This has a positive impact upon improving attendance levels in most instances.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- early years teaching and learning enable higher proportions of boys to achieve a good level of development and to be better prepared to start Year 1
- ongoing leadership development is provided for the headteacher designate in preparation for taking up post in May 2017.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Reeves
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I discussed the work of the school with you and the assistant headteacher. I talked with pupils about what it feels like to be a member of the school community. I observed and spoke with pupils during playtime and at other times during the day. I held discussions with your education development partner and with five governors who were able to provide me with additional information. I also took into account school documentation, assessment information, policies and information posted on the school website. I considered the 24 responses to the parent questionnaire, Parent View. I also reviewed the six responses to the staff questionnaire and the 25 responses to the pupil questionnaire. Alongside you, I visited all classes to observe teaching and learning, during which time I listened to pupils from a range of abilities read. We looked at pupils' mathematics and English work to help us evaluate the quality of teaching and learning over time. Behaviour and attendance records and information relating to safeguarding were also considered.

This inspection particularly focused upon the following aspects of the school's work:

- leaders' and governors' impact on addressing areas for improvement in the previous inspection report and the school's leadership arrangements
- the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in mathematics, writing and spelling, and current pupils' progress in these subjects
- the impact of the actions of leaders and staff to improve pupils' attendance levels, particularly for pupils who have low levels of attendance
- children's progress in the early years.