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Mrs Claire McKie
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Dear Mrs McKie

Short inspection of Plumbland CofE School

Following my visit to the school on 24 January 2017, 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 September 2011.

This school continues to be good.

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

You are keen to provide the best for your pupils and always have their welfare and achievement at the centre of your work. You have enhanced your pupils' experience of school since the previous inspection in a number of ways. You have developed a forest school to increase pupils' self-confidence and allow them to take controlled risks in an outdoor environment. You have increased the variety of extra-curricular clubs, which include sports clubs, such as football and multi-skills, and other interests, like craft club and horse-riding. Through the curriculum, in subjects such as religious education, and through visits to places such as a Buddhist temple, you develop pupils' tolerance of others' beliefs and respect for other cultures. All of these activities promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.

You and other school leaders are ambitious for your pupils' academic success. You analysed the most recently published assessment information and concluded that pupils needed to achieve better in mathematics by the end of Year 6. You devised actions that are having a positive effect, as current pupils make good progress. However, you and your leaders do not precisely evaluate the impact of your actions on pupils' achievement, so as to make the actions even more effective.

Pupils like coming to school and say that it is a safe place because the teachers look after them. They understand the different forms of bullying that exist and they know how to stay safe online. They read well and the most able show good fluency and comprehension, while less-able readers make good use of phonics to help them read unfamiliar words. They also enjoy the variety of activities and visits that you and your staff organise. They are articulate and polite and show confidence to talk to trusted adults. One child in Reception even offered to show me round the playground at lunchtime and proceeded to do so.

Parents who responded to the online survey were overwhelmingly positive about the school. They appreciated the enhanced curriculum activities that the school provides and the 'fantastic' communication systems that are in place. Typically, parents commented that the children are 'well cared for and safe'.

At your last inspection, your areas for improvement related to raising pupils' attainment further and accelerating progress. Current pupils are progressing well and your checks on the quality of teaching and learning are effective.

A check of the school's website has revealed that it is not currently compliant in respect of the information you publish about the school's curriculum. You have undertaken to include more detail about the content of the curriculum to rectify this matter.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. You and your staff are knowledgeable about the signs of abuse and are aware of issues such as child sexual exploitation and radicalisation. The culture of safeguarding in the school is strong and is based on trust and good relationships between adults and pupils. You and your staff teach your pupils how to stay safe, with the result that they feel safe in school.

Inspection findings

- I followed several key lines of enquiry during my inspection, based on the available evidence before I arrived at the school. The first of these was to explore the extent to which you and other school leaders had addressed the areas for improvement from the previous inspection report. These areas for improvement centred on raising pupils' attainment further and accelerating progress. It is clear that progress and attainment are strong for the large majority of pupils. You have achieved this by checking thoroughly on the quality of teaching and learning. You carry out lesson observations that have clear focuses on aspects of teaching that have an impact on pupil's learning, such as the quality of the questions that teachers ask pupils. You feed back to staff well, noting strengths and areas to improve. Teachers also follow the school's marking and feedback policy consistently, so that pupils know how to improve. Consequently, teaching is effective, as evidenced by the good progress current pupils are making.

- The next key line of enquiry concerned the achievement of children in the early years. Published assessment information for 2015 demonstrated that only one child out of seven in the year group achieved a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year. You acted to improve this for the following year's Reception children, including the provision of booster sessions and extra reading support. Towards the end of their Reception Year, you also introduced to the children some of the early learning that takes place in Year 1, to provide some challenge and prepare them for moving into Year 1. Because of your actions, four out of five children achieved a good level of development in 2016. You have continued with your strategies for the current Reception children and they are making good progress. For example, the most able have quickly progressed to writing simple recognisable sentences and most children communicate well, sometimes using complex sentences or questions involving words like 'if'.
- The third key line of enquiry focused on achievement in mathematics, with emphasis on the progress of pupils in key stage 2, especially girls. You identified from the published assessment information for 2016 that pupils' achievement in mathematics, though in line overall with national averages, was not as strong as achievement in English. To address this issue, you have provided extra support sessions in Year 6 and you have made sure teachers share clear steps for improvement through your feedback policy. Consequently, most pupils who are currently in key stage 2 make good progress and acquire the mathematical knowledge, understanding and skills they need. However, teachers do not consistently challenge the most able in Year 6. They give them work that is too easy for them, with the result that these pupils do not get opportunities to grapple with more complex ideas.
- In the next key line of enquiry, I explored the absence of pupils achieving the higher standard in English grammar, punctuation and spelling in the assessment at the end of key stage 2 in 2016. You have addressed this issue by providing dedicated sessions to Year 6 pupils to strengthen their understanding. You also ensure that teachers give suitably challenging work to the most able. Consequently, pupils in this group make good progress, as they can, for instance, correctly use advanced punctuation, such as colons and semi-colons, in their writing.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers challenge the most able pupils consistently
- they precisely evaluate the impact on pupils' achievement of actions they include in the school's improvement plans
- they make the website compliant by including more detail about the school's curriculum.

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

Mark Quinn
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I carried out short visits to all year groups, including the early years, which were joint activities with you. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation summary, action plans for school improvement, records of the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning and records connected with the safeguarding of children. I held discussions with members of staff, governors and pupils. I listened to pupils read and analysed pupils' work. I evaluated 15 responses received through 'Parent View' (Ofsted's online survey) and three responses received through the online staff survey. There were no other survey responses.