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Mrs Sian Taylor  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Taylor

### **Short inspection of Croftlands Infant School**

Following my visit to the school on 31 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 May 2012.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have successfully created a culture of improvement in the school in which staff are encouraged to share their ideas on school improvement and you are very willing to listen. Staff say that this school is a very supportive community in which everyone feels valued and works together as a team.

You have been successful in tackling the improvements needed at the time of your last inspection. Staff greatly appreciate the many opportunities they now have to develop their skills through courses they attend and their work with other schools in your Small Schools Partnership (SSP), and beyond, to improve teaching and learning. Teachers have a shared understanding of what outstanding teaching and learning looks like and this is helping pupils to make better progress.

You have improved your systems to monitor and evaluate teaching since the previous inspection. You carry out regular checks on the quality of teaching through scheduled visits to lessons and checks on pupils' work in books. The quality of this monitoring is further assured through internal and external moderation activities with other schools in the SSP. You track the progress of pupils carefully and provide personalised support for any who fall behind. As a result, pupils are well supported and encouraged to achieve their best.

Improving achievement in the early years was a recommendation in the previous inspection and particularly in personal, social and emotional development. You

identified that weaknesses stem from children's previous experience of education, or lack of it, because not all of the children in Reception started the school in your nursery. You have made sure that teachers assess children accurately as they start in Reception and that effective teaching tackles any weaknesses.

You know the strengths and weaknesses of the school well and continue to tackle new and emerging weaknesses as they arise.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders have created a culture of safeguarding in the school in which all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records kept are detailed, accurate and stored safely. Staff have completed safeguarding training appropriate to their role and have a thorough understanding of the procedures to follow if they have concerns about a child. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe from a range of risks and threats. Pupils in Year 2 have a good understanding of feelings and relationships appropriate to their age because teaching of these, and other themes, is effectively delivered by a well-trained teaching assistant.

### **Inspection findings**

- Attendance was a line of enquiry for this inspection because disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are more frequently absent than their classmates. Your strategies to work with families to reduce the number who take holidays during term time have been successful, and persistent absence for these groups is reducing. These pupils now miss less work and are starting to make better progress.
- Attendance overall is on track to remain above the national average because pupils enjoy coming to this school. They are happy here and enjoy the many trips and clubs available to them.
- Due to a decline in the proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the time they start Year 1, this became a line of enquiry for this inspection. I found that children in your Nursery and Reception groups are well cared for, happy and well supported in their learning as they develop their social skills. Well-planned opportunities are provided for them to learn about other cultures, such as their work on the Chinese New Year. They enjoy learning about sounds and making rhymes; and they demonstrated good fine-motor skills in using pincers to handle tiny objects and good pencil control in drawing mazes. Teaching in the early years is therefore effective.
- It appeared that your work to support achievement in phonics for some pupils has not always been fully successful in the past, and therefore this was a line of enquiry for the inspection. I found that you know individual pupils very well and you showed me individual pupils' action plans linking to support they have received to tackle weaknesses in their phonics development. This support helps them to improve their skills.
- Teaching of reading is effective. Pupils who read to me used their phonic strategies to help them to sound out difficult words. Two years ago you took steps to tailor teaching more closely to pupils' abilities in phonics. This is now

starting to have an impact, and an above-average proportion of pupils successfully reached the expected standard in phonics in 2016.

- Improving standards in writing is one of your key priorities, including for disadvantaged pupils and the most able. You have identified weaknesses in handwriting and in spelling, punctuation and grammar and are developing strategies to tackle these weaknesses through ideas seen in other schools, including introducing the cursive script from the start.
- Teachers help pupils to improve their writing but are not always clear about what they want pupils to change. This is confusing for pupils who can't always follow the teachers' advice, for example 'improve neatness' when the weakness was errors in letter formation not modelled well enough by the teacher.
- Standards reached by the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, was a line of enquiry for this inspection. Your partnership work with Croftlands Junior School provides further opportunities for your most able pupils to deepen their understanding of mathematics to a greater depth. This work has only recently started so it is too soon to gauge its success.
- Governance, seen as a strength of the school at the last inspection, has recently undergone several changes. A line of enquiry therefore was to find out if governance continues to be effective. Several governors have only recently been appointed, including the chair of governors and the vice-chair, and not all governors have completed training appropriate to their role at this stage.
- Governors have a robust knowledge of how pupil premium funding is spent to support individual pupils in overcoming their barriers to learning and immediate action was taken during the inspection to make sure that the most recent child protection policy was provided for parents on the school website.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- governors who are new in their role have the necessary skills and knowledge to enable them to carry out their responsibilities effectively
- teachers help pupils to improve their standard in writing by giving advice which makes it clear to pupils exactly what it is that they need to change or to practise
- they check the work of pupils in mathematics, particularly the most able, to make sure that teaching is having the desired impact on deepening their understanding.

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

Yours sincerely

Denah Jones  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, I checked your safeguarding documentation and met with a range of staff, including yourself, other leaders and a group of governors. I spoke with a representative from the local authority in a telephone conversation. In addition to responses made by staff and parents to Ofsted's surveys, I talked to parents as they picked up their children at the end of the day. I talked with pupils during the day, listened to them read and saw them at work when you joined me in visits to lessons, when we also looked at pupils' work in books.