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Mrs Helen Hepworth
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Hepworth

Short inspection of Armathwaite School

Following my visit to the school on 9 February 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 January 2013.

This school continues to be good.

Your leadership has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You provide clear direction for the school and share your vision effectively with staff and governors. High standards have been maintained in the early years with 100% of children achieving a good level of development in the last two years. Children in the early years are exceptionally well prepared for Year 1. Pupils make at least good progress across key stages 1 and 2. Caution must be exercised in drawing conclusions from published performance data because there are very few pupils in some year groups.

At your last inspection an area for improvement was to improve pupils' mental mathematics recall skills. Pupils now use these skills to solve number problems across a range of subjects and in their independent project work. For example, when pupils have written a book they have to work out the cost of publication before deciding on their sale price, in order to make a profit for their chosen charities.

In response to another area for improvement at your previous inspection, you now closely check on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. You shared with me how you provide clear guidance on how to improve specific areas and teachers have responded well to this direction.

All staff at your school ensure that pupils are happy and attend school regularly. In

lessons and at breaktimes, there is an ethos of mutual support and respect. Relationships between adults and pupils are exemplary. This was reflected in conversations with staff, pupils and parents. All parents who used the Ofsted text messaging service and Parent View (Ofsted's online parent questionnaire) expressed their delight with all aspects of the school's work. Parents and pupils greatly value the opportunities for pupils to develop specific areas of interest leading to, for example, pupils scripting their own shows, auditioning pupils for parts, and managing rehearsals and performances to parents and the wider village community.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed. You and your staff are highly vigilant and your regular staff meetings to discuss pupils' needs illustrate your pro-active approach towards safeguarding. Recruitment checks completed on staff are rigorous. There have been no incidents relating to safeguarding concerns since the previous inspection. If any incidents should occur, staff know the correct procedures to follow and the need to keep information logged and secure. Pupils are aware of how to keep themselves safe, including when they are working online. They are aware of the importance of attending school and this is reflected in continued above-average attendance and persistent absence which is well below the norm. Pupils feel safe and secure because of the approachability of all staff.

Inspection findings

- A key focus of the inspection was to see the impact of strategies put in place to improve mathematics in key stage 2 for all pupils and particularly girls. With Armathwaite being such a small school, there is a wide range of pupils' abilities and a broad age range in each class. You now check that teachers use assessment information to plan work and check that activities provide the challenge needed for individual pupils. You and the governors have invested in extra support for individuals and small groups from highly skilled teaching assistants; this is targeted to accelerate pupils' progress. This, combined with innovative online one-to-one tutoring is motivating pupils well and they are making rapid progress. New programmes of support need to be closely monitored for their impact on progress over time.
- I also considered the progress being made in reading by boys in key stage 2. You have focused effectively on this priority by focused teaching, including showing pupils how to use their phonic skills. The boys whom I heard reading used their phonic skills well to read words. Some of the lower-ability pupils in Years 5 and 6 demonstrated how well they could work out unfamiliar words by blending the sounds of letters. They then talked about the possible meaning of the word given the context of the sentence before checking the meaning using a dictionary. Your own records of progress indicate how well boys are progressing in their reading over time. You have invested in a wide range of books which inspire and excite girls and boys alike. Pupils who were reading comic-style books in class could also talk to me about other books they were reading such as 'The diary of Anne Frank', which enabled them to think about the impact of the holocaust.

- Reading logs are effectively used to communicate between school and home, enabling you to ensure that pupils are reading on a regular basis. Pupils are developing a love of reading to broaden their knowledge as well as for pleasure.
- We agreed that pupils' writing is improving. You have put in place many and varied opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills and particularly grammar, punctuation and spelling. There are regular sessions in the week to work on improving spellings. Pupils routinely learn new words and how to spell them. They are skilled in using dictionaries in order to check their own work and learn the meaning of unfamiliar words. A striking example of how pupils develop their writing skills is in their independent project work. They relish choosing their own tasks that range from designing a tractor to writing and then reciting poetry to an audience. Pupils keep a log of their plans and next steps which brings a real purpose to, and enjoyment of, writing.
- We considered the school's monitoring of teaching. You and leaders of subjects provide detailed guidance on how teachers can improve the quality of their teaching. Specific areas in need of improvement are identified through lesson observations, learning walks and scrutiny of pupils' work. Governors are effective in both supporting and challenging the school in its monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning. Additional checks on the quality of teaching and learning would ensure that the school is keeping up to date with new strategies and ideas to accelerate pupils' progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- evaluate more closely the impact of relatively new interventions to improve achievement in mathematics in key stage 2
- carry out some additional evaluations of the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in mathematics in key stage 2, to ensure that pupils' progress is maximised.

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

Naomi Taylor
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

- I observed teaching in class jointly with the headteacher and looked at the work being done by small groups of pupils.

- I looked through a range of pupils' work, particularly in mathematics, and took account of work from across the curriculum such as the independent projects of individual pupils.
- I heard pupils reading and I spoke with pupils informally around school and at breaktime.
- I observed pupils' behaviour at lunchtime, when pupils were moving in and around the school, and during lessons.
- Meetings were held with staff, governors and senior leaders. I analysed responses made by staff to Ofsted's questionnaire and had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority.
- I considered a range of documentation, including the school's evaluation of its own performance and the performance information for pupils currently in school.
- I also reviewed safeguarding documentation and how this related to daily practice, as well as speaking with staff and children.
- I spoke to several parents and analysed the Ofsted online parent questionnaire (Parent View) in addition to the texts sent from parents to Ofsted.