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Mr Richard Allen
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Dear Mr Allen

Short inspection of The Billingham Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 7 March 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 February 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 where everyone is valued and supported as a learner. Staff appreciate the investment that leaders make in them by providing high-quality professional development. Staff are willing to try new approaches to teaching. They are keen to share their successes with their colleagues and yet they are unafraid to alter them if they are not successful. Teachers encourage pupils to be resilient and have a go. One pupil summarised the culture of the school by explaining to me, 'If you make a mistake, you can do it again. It's OK to get it wrong.'

The governing body has a clear understanding of the strategic role it plays in the leadership of the school. You and the governors have an accurate view of the provision at the school and its performance. Together, you use this information to draw up carefully targeted plans for improvement. My discussions with governors and scrutiny of the minutes of meetings of the governing body showed that several governors are skilled at asking searching questions. Governors are keen to improve these skills further, however, so that their support and challenge for your leadership can be of the highest quality.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors asked you to ensure that pupils make good progress in writing and to make the most of the talents of the most able pupils. Our visits to classrooms showed that teachers are providing challenging work

for the most able pupils. They receive additional support to enhance their knowledge and understanding. More pupils in Year 6 achieved the higher standard in mathematics and in spelling, punctuation and grammar than the proportions seen nationally at the end of 2016.

Since the last inspection, you have changed the school's approach to teaching writing. Teachers ensure that pupils are inspired to write with a clear purpose, for example writing thank you letters following a school trip or writing that is linked to the local war memorial project. Since the last inspection, standards in writing have improved. You astutely noticed, however, that although the proportion of pupils in Year 6 achieving the expected standard in writing in 2016 was higher than the national average, no pupil achieved the higher standard. You and other leaders responded to this immediately, making writing a focus once more.

In 2014, the new national curriculum brought a sharper focus to pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar skills. The leader with responsibility for English responded well to this. She has provided useful training for staff so that they can teach these important skills more effectively. Pupils are achieving well in these skills, with a higher proportion achieving the higher standard at the end of Year 6 than was seen nationally at the end of 2016. As we looked at pupils' books together, we saw that teachers insist that pupils use their spelling and punctuation skills well during English lessons. Teachers do not reliably insist that pupils use them as accurately, nor present their work as neatly, when they write across other subjects.

You strive to provide pupils with experiences that will broaden their knowledge, aspirations and understanding of the world. You invite visitors into school to talk to pupils. For example, a female officer of the Royal Air Force came to talk to pupils about her career. You make sure that pupils learn about a wide range of cultures and religions. You have forged strong links with a multicultural school in Leicester. Pupils enjoy communicating with their peers in the city. They talk very respectfully about people whose lifestyles or beliefs are different to their own.

Pupils behave very well in lessons and around school. They are polite to each other and adults alike. They listen courteously to each other's ideas in class. Strong relationships between staff and pupils support the purposeful atmosphere around the school. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and, in all the classes I visited, pupils were keen to answer the teacher's questions and complete the work they had been set.

Safeguarding is effective.

All the appropriate vetting checks are completed before a member of staff or volunteer starts working at the school. You make sure that all the staff have taken part in the most recent training. They are able to spot potential signs of abuse and know how to report any concerns they have about a child's welfare. You keep detailed records relating to the safeguarding of pupils. You make sure that safeguarding is the first item on the agenda of every staff meeting so that staff are kept up to date with this important aspect of their work.

Every parent who expressed a view said that their children are safe in school. Pupils, too, told me that they are safe. You make sure that they are taught how to keep themselves safe when they use modern technology. Four pupils in Year 6 act as e-safety counsellors. They check the 'e-safety worry box' weekly so that they can quickly answer any questions their peers raise about online safety. Pupils who spoke with me could not think of any bullying that occurs in school. However, they could all think of a trusted adult who they could turn to, should the need arise.

Inspection findings

- Recently, there has been a decline in the proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of the early years. You and the early years leader have identified precisely the reason for this. The highly reflective early years leader has adapted the provision and support for the children to ensure that the learning is at just the right level for them. During my visit to the early years classroom I saw that children were receiving the appropriate support and challenge to be able to make progress and achieve well. Children with particular needs were also being very well supported.
- Over recent years, pupils' attendance has not reached the national average. You have implemented a number of strategies to improve this situation. You check attendance information carefully every week and you communicate with parents when you are concerned. Slowly, pupils' rates of attendance are improving, but they are not yet in line with the national average.
- You and other leaders are outward looking in your approach to improving the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school. Teachers and teaching assistants have benefited from participating in research projects to help them to improve their practice, for example in the effective deployment of staff and use of time during lessons. Following careful analysis, you are prepared to stop a project if you notice that it is not having the desired impact. During our visits to classrooms, we saw teachers and teaching assistants using their new skills to good effect to support learning for pupils of all abilities.
- Teachers and teaching assistants are highly skilled at using the correct technical vocabulary to explain new ideas clearly to pupils. They ask well-considered questions to deepen pupils' understanding of new concepts. Teachers plan learning that is fun and engaging for pupils. Pupils wrote descriptions of superheroes, for example, and shared sweets to learn about fractions. Pupils say they enjoy their lessons and that learning is fun.
- Parents are highly supportive of the school. They were keen to tell me that staff, both classroom-based staff and those who greet them in the school office, are welcoming and approachable. Every parent who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend the school to others. One parent summarised the views of many by explaining, 'Our children could not be in better hands than they are here!'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers insist on the same high-quality presentation and use of spelling and punctuation when pupils write in other subjects as they do in English
- they work more extensively with relevant parents to improve pupils' rates of attendance
- all governors become equally skilled at challenging leaders so that the governing body can better hold leaders to account.

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

Yours sincerely

Di Mullan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, and six governors, including the chair of the governing body. I spoke with a representative of the local authority on the telephone. I listened to two pupils reading. I spoke with pupils in class and met a group of six pupils more formally. I spoke with parents as they brought their children to school in the morning and took account of their views from the 11 responses to the online survey, Parent View. I also took account of the seven responses to a staff survey and the single response to an online survey for pupils.

You and I visited every classroom together to see the learning that was taking place. I looked at pupils' books in class and with you. I examined a range of school documentation including minutes of meetings of the governing body, the school's plans for improvement, its self-evaluation document and documents related to safeguarding.