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Mrs Christine Wilson
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Dear Mrs Wilson

Short inspection of Kirkby Thore Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 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 June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

You and your staff have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. There have been some changes to staffing since the previous inspection and classes have reduced to three mixed-year groups due to the decline in pupil numbers. You have instigated appropriate changes to the structure of the governing body. You continue to provide a clear direction for the school and share your ambitious vision effectively with staff and governors. You continually strive to identify and remove barriers to pupils' learning. Staff, governors, pupils and parents are rightly proud of their school. Parents describe Kirkby Thore as 'a great village school' in which their children develop a 'love of learning which comes from the teachers'.

The previous inspection in 2013 asked the school to raise achievement in writing. In key stage 2 there is evidence now of more fluent joined writing. Most of the time, pupils are now taking more care in the presentation of their work across subjects, showing pride in their work. Your staff ensure a wide range of opportunities through trips and topic work to stimulate creative writing opportunities. This was clear to see in the topic work on the Stone Age which had captured pupils' imaginations and which pupils clearly enjoyed and still talk about.

Another action for leaders and managers was to fully engage with external support for pupils whose progress appears to be stalling or whose special needs are becoming difficult to meet. In response, you worked with the local authority to address the dip in standards in 2014 and improve the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Having seen improvements in pupils' progress in 2015, it was decided that you no longer needed the support that had previously been required. You also have evidence of effectively engaging with a range of external agencies, such as educational psychologists, when specialist assessment and support are needed by particular pupils. These partnerships are proving to be effective in supporting pupils and their families.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are effective and detailed records are of high quality. School leaders take their responsibility with regard to safeguarding very seriously. Appropriate statutory checks are vigilantly carried out on the suitability of staff to work with children. School policies are published on the school's website and are compliant with government guidance. All your staff who work in the school in whatever capacity are well trained in child protection.

You and your staff have created a safe environment for pupils. Pupils say that they feel safe because they know whom they can talk to if they have a problem and they are sure staff will always help them. Parents described how well their children settle when they join the school in Reception class because of the 'school's family atmosphere'. Pupils have a thorough understanding of different types of bullying and say that occurrences of bullying in school are very rare. The older pupils have recently taken part in the national 'safer internet day' and produced leaflets displayed in school on how to keep safe when using technology. Parents are also very pleased with the opportunity children have to develop their first aid skills.

Inspection findings

- A focus of the inspection was to consider whether the teaching of writing is effective for boys and for disadvantaged pupils in key stages 1 and 2. This was following a downturn in outcomes in 2016 when these groups of pupils made weaker progress than was typical for pupils in the school. Improvements to teaching have resulted in an increase in pupils' engagement in writing across the school. Pupils are now making better progress in their learning. Pupils, for example in Year 3 and Year 4, were seen eagerly recounting their visit to the Science Centre in Newcastle the previous week. Boys were keen to tell me about the robot that they had created as part of their 'Mad scientists' topic, and this was reflected in their reporting of what they had learned during their visit to Newcastle. This enthusiasm was shared by disadvantaged pupils and those who had special educational needs and/or disabilities.

- The second focus I considered was why some pupils, especially girls, did not make the progress expected of them in mathematics at the end of key stage 2 in 2016. You have started to address this by purchasing new resources, some of which have not yet been delivered to the school. Due to the unavoidable absence through illness of teaching assistants, you have also had to adapt your small group and one-to-one intervention work. We agreed that new resources and interventions will need to be regularly monitored to measure the impact on accelerating pupils' progress. In key stage 2 mathematics lessons and in pupils' books, it was clear to see that girls and boys alike were engaged in developing their skills in mathematics. Following our joint observation of Years 5 and 6 using a game of dominoes to extend their understanding of percentages, fractions and decimals, I looked at pupils' books in the afternoon. Girls and boys alike had clearly developed their skills and were able to effectively use the mathematical skills in problem solving. The instigation of older pupils running the tuck shop at breaktimes is also an effective way in making the use of mathematical skills real for your pupils.
- Third, the development of core skills in the early years was considered as in 2016 fewer boys than girls reached a good level of development. Records of children's achievement in the Reception class known as 'learning journeys' provide evidence to show the range of opportunities offered to develop both girls' and boys' formation of letters, including activities using paints and chalk. Children's speaking and listening skills are encouraged alongside key stage 1 children in the same class. Boys were as enthusiastic as girls in their keenness to tell others in their class about ideas they had to encourage the farmer in their story to get on with his work rather than being lazy. There are good opportunities to use their mathematical skills at snack time when the early years children have to find the correct coins to buy their snack.
- Another aspect of the inspection was to explore how pupils develop their spelling, punctuation and grammar skills. Sessions are now timetabled to specifically address the development of each of these skills and these are proving to be effective in developing pupils' progress. However, pupils do not systematically check their work for errors and we agreed that this would help them to reach a higher standard in their writing skills.
- Finally, during the inspection, I checked the attendance data for your pupils and particularly for those who have repeated absence. It became evident that the unavoidable absence due to serious illness of a very small minority of pupils in such a small school has a negative impact on attendance data. It was clear at the start of the school day just how excited pupils are to come to school. This was endorsed during the course of the inspection in lessons and at breaktimes. Also, in discussions with pupils and in feedback from parents, it was evident that you and your staff 'go the extra mile' to bring learning to life for pupils so that they make good progress in their academic studies. During their time at Kirkby Thore, pupils also have the opportunity to experience life beyond their rural community, and so their personal development is well supported and they grow

into well-rounded young people. For example, their performance in 'Young voices' with other schools at the Manchester Arena was described by a parent in a school newsletter as 'a wonderful magical experience for the children and, of course, parents and grandparents'.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should:

- evaluate more closely the impact of new interventions and resources to improve achievement in mathematics across the school
- ensure that pupils develop skills to check their work for errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar, and so improve their progress in creative writing.

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 met with you to agree my lines of enquiry and the timetable for the inspection. I investigated with you the progress that the school has made since the last inspection and the quality of safeguarding in the school. I met with the chair of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.

To gather information about teaching standards, we jointly observed teaching in all three classes. I looked through some of the work in pupils' books from across the school. I listened to pupils reading in Year 2 and Year 6. In addition to talking to pupils informally, I met with a group of pupils during lunchtime to gather their views of their school.

To gather the views of parents, I talked to several parents as they brought their children to school, analysed the 11 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and read text messages that parents had sent to Ofsted.

I spoke with several staff who shared their views verbally with me.