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Miss Rachel Hindle
Headteacher
Coniston CofE Primary School
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Dear Miss Hindle

Short inspection of Coniston CofE 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 July 2013.

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 developed a respectful, caring and cooperative ethos which supports pupils to fulfil their potential and prepare for the future. You and your team work together to ensure that every pupil receives the care and support needed to thrive. You have established a happy, healthy and responsible community in which pupils are encouraged to care for their school, their local environment and the wider world. Your staff share your unshakable commitment to providing pupils with the best possible education. Pupils enjoy coming to school and are enthusiastic about their learning. Members of staff appreciate your driven and considerate leadership and value working at the school. One teacher encapsulated the sentiments of many on the staff when she told the inspector, 'I thoroughly enjoy and love coming to school.'

Since the last inspection, you have raised the expectations for pupils' achievement and you have ensured that all staff are accountable for the progress made by the pupils that they work with. You have managed the school's budget astutely during a lean period of low pupil numbers and have overseen the growth in the school's popularity and the size of the pupil population. The school's budget is now much healthier and you have used additional funds flexibly and creatively to ensure that the quality of teaching continues to improve and areas of relative weakness are tackled head-on. You have a perceptive understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and an accurate view of the school's effectiveness. Your plans to improve the school address relative weaknesses and you ensure that all

members of staff are empowered to take responsibility for driving improvements in key areas. Despite this, your plans to improve the school do not contain measurable targets. As a result, leaders and governors are unable to evaluate the extent to which different actions are improving the school.

You are currently on maternity leave but have remained in regular contact with the acting headteacher to ensure continuity. The acting headteacher is also the headteacher at John Ruskin School, a local secondary school, and he divides his time between the two schools. His involvement with the school has helped to further drive improvement. He has successfully introduced many strategies for accelerating progress that have been used to good effect in his own school, such as improving the tracking of pupils' progress. As a result, pupils currently in the school are making good progress.

You have ensured that the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have been tackled effectively. Inspectors asked the school to improve the teaching of mathematics and you have tackled this with a new broad and coherent strategy. New members of staff have been recruited with a background in mathematics. You have provided training for all staff that enables them to teach mathematics more effectively. You have ensured that teachers provide pupils with work that is matched closely to their abilities. The focus has been on mathematical problem-solving and the practical application of mathematics. As a result, pupils now make as much progress in mathematics as they do in other subjects. However, you are keen to guard against complacency and recognise that there is still work to be done to embed improvements and develop the teaching of mathematics further.

Safeguarding is effective.

Your work to safeguard pupils is robust. You ensure that all appropriate checks are carried out on prospective employees, governors and volunteers. Your safeguarding policy is thorough and regularly updated in light of new legislation. All staff receive regular training that equips them with the knowledge and understanding of different safeguarding issues. Your staff know the pupils exceptionally well and are sensitive to any subtle changes in their mood or presentation. All safeguarding arrangements are effective and records contain an appropriate level of detail. Pupils are supported well to develop an age-appropriate understanding of risk. For example, the school utilises support from the local police community support officer to develop pupils' understanding of how to stay safe online. Although the school has not recently had to deal with any serious safeguarding incidents, all staff subscribe to your mantra that 'it could happen here'.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on a number of key lines of enquiry. One of these was to see how well pupils are supported to make progress throughout the school, particularly in light of the disappointing outcomes of the Year 6 tests in 2016. You have used this disappointment as a springboard for evaluating all aspects of the school's work. You have analysed the reasons for the poor performance

perceptively and you, along with the acting headteacher, have put strategies in place to ensure that pupils currently in Year 6 are better prepared for the demands of national tests. For example, you have ensured that pupils receive additional support needed to accelerate progress or help pupils to catch up with their peers. He has also improved assessment and ensured that pupils have the stamina and speed to achieve to their full potential in national tests.

- You have ensured that teaching caters effectively for pupils of different ages and abilities. You are acutely aware of the challenges presented by teaching mixed-age classes and you ensure that the monitoring of teaching routinely focuses on how well the needs of different groups are met. Teaching is consistently strong across the school. Teachers' explanations are clear and pre-empt potential misconceptions. As a result, pupils are supported effectively and make good progress throughout the school.
- You employ a range of strategies to ensure that pupils complete work that challenges them to make fast progress. However, you acknowledge that teachers' expectations of what the most able pupils can achieve are not always high enough. Although this is beginning to change, and more of the most able are now making accelerated progress, you recognise that this is an area that the school needs to focus on.
- Your team have ensured that pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Your team ensure that pupils have a secure knowledge of their local environment and the wider world. All pupils exchange regular correspondence with pen pals in South Korea. Pupils also benefit from a range of trips and visits that extend their understanding of different lifestyles and cultures. For example, pupils stay overnight in Manchester and explore many aspects of life in an urban environment.
- Your promotion of fundamental British values is also effective. The school council provides a meaningful model of democracy and elected members of the school council contribute to the workings of the local parish council. Consequently, pupils hold values that will enable them to lead responsible lives within the global community.
- Pupils are encouraged to lead healthy lifestyles. They enthusiastically engage in a range of sports and a Paralympic athlete recently visited the school to inspire even greater sporting participation. As a result of this work, pupils appreciate the importance of healthy living and recognise the importance of leading active and healthy lives.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- improvements to the teaching of mathematics are embedded and further developed so that pupils continue to make faster progress in this area
- teachers accelerate and deepen the progress made by the most able pupils
- plans to develop the school contain measurable targets that will enable leaders to evaluate the effectiveness of different actions.

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

Will Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- The inspector undertook 'learning walks' with you and the acting headteacher to observe teaching and learning throughout the school. The inspector worked with the acting headteacher to scrutinise the work in pupils' books.
- Meetings took place with you, the acting headteacher, members of staff, the chair of governors, two representatives from the local authority and groups of pupils. Informal discussions were held with pupils to gather their views on behaviour and learning.
- The inspector examined a range of supporting documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and development plan. The inspector also looked closely at the school's website.
- The inspector took into account seven responses to the staff questionnaire and three responses to the pupil questionnaire. He also considered six comments made by parents through Ofsted's free text service.