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Miss Christine Ormerod
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Ormerod

Short inspection of Bowburn Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 28 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 April 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 and your very capable governors have a clear vision centred on meeting the needs of every child from your diverse community. You firmly believe every child is different and special and that each child has specific needs which you strive to meet. The actions you have taken to improve the school since the previous inspection clearly reflect this. You have focused on providing the best-possible start for children in the early years and your provision for two-year-olds introduced in September 2013 is reaping rewards. Your youngest children quickly respond to the nurturing environment you provide and quickly develop personally and socially so that they are ready to learn in the Nursery and Reception Years. By focusing on children's early development you have ensured that the proportion who reach the expected standard by the end of the Reception Year has climbed annually and is set to rise further still in 2017.

You and your staff have worked tirelessly since the last inspection to address inconsistencies in outcomes across core subjects evident at the time of the previous inspection. Outcomes in reading continue to be strong and the proportion of pupils attaining the expected standard in the national phonics screening check has been well above the national average in recent years. This reflects the positive impact of the numerous language-based activities and resources your staff provide in classrooms and outdoor spaces. Pleasingly, you have successfully strengthened the teaching of writing and mathematics so that pupils now make equally strong progress in these subjects. In 2016, pupils made more progress from their starting

points in reading, writing and mathematics than seen nationally. Consequently, although many children entered the school with skills below those typical for their age, they reach standards above those seen nationally by the end of Year 2.

You are, however, conscious that some groups of pupils still do not attain as well as others and have centred your current plans for improvement on eradicating these inequalities. Last year, boys did not reach the same standards as girls and some of your disadvantaged pupils, particularly in the Reception and Year 2 classes, have not caught up with other pupils in the school. You and your staff are providing well-considered additional teaching for pupils who need it and you are checking the impact of this support every few weeks. Your most recent assessment information shows these actions are having a positive impact and gaps in pupils' attainment are narrowing.

Safeguarding is effective.

The safeguarding of all pupils is given the highest priority at Bowburn Infant School. The leadership team are well supported by knowledgeable and highly effective administrative staff. Rigorous checks are made on all members of staff and visitors to the school and regular training is provided for all members of staff. Everyone knows what actions to take if they have any concerns about a child's safety or well-being. You keep detailed records about the steps you take to protect a child and you feel very well supported by external partners in the local authority and the police. Since the previous inspection, you have been able to strengthen your links with the local community through the appointment of the parent support adviser. As a result, your partnerships with families have been strengthened and your support for more vulnerable pupils is more effective.

Pupils feel entirely safe and confident. Your curriculum helps them to understand risks such as road safety and how to protect their identity when online. They told me there is very little bullying and that they trust their teachers, who are friendly, helpful and kind.

Inspection findings

- You have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses and work openly and transparently with the governors so that they know where to focus their support and challenge. Your plans for improvement reflect the thoroughness of your monitoring and focus on the most pressing priorities. You and your deputy ensure that your priorities are effectively communicated and are well understood by your staff.
- The governors are passionately committed to providing the best possible infant school for the community. They ensure that they access regular training to develop their understanding of governance and scrutinise the effectiveness of the school's work through their frequent committee meetings and regular visits. They describe the school as having 'an open door' which allows them to check all aspects of the school and support your drive for improvement.
- During the inspection, I looked closely at the impact of the schools' decision to

admit two-year-olds into the nursery. This was because in the past the majority of children joining the nursery entered the school with skills that were below those expected for their age. I found you have developed a specialist classroom for two-year-olds which is bright, colourful, stimulating and well resourced. Your teachers assess each child's development carefully and have done much to foster effective learning partnerships with parents. You provide an environment which accelerates children's personal and social development and additional one-to-one support to help with their speech and language skills. As a result, most children now enter their Nursery Year with skills that are more typical for their age. Across the early years classes, you build effectively on this excellent start by strong promotion of reading, writing and number skills. Children employed these skills effectively during my visit to complete a treasure hunt and to design and label their own car racing track. It was therefore clear to me why standards at the end of the Reception Year have consistently improved in recent years.

- I also wanted to look closely at the attainment of boys relative to that of girls, as there was a noticeable difference in their attainment at the end of Year 2 last year. You have clearly looked closely at this issue. You have reviewed your curriculum and added more content which appeals explicitly to boys. You have also focused on ensuring boys are more motivated and inspired to write. Nevertheless, your assessment information continues to show boys' attainment lags behind that of girls in some classes. You are providing additional teaching across the day for those boys who have fallen behind, in an effort to address this gap, and there are signs that this is having a positive impact.
- I also paid particular attention to the attainment of disadvantaged pupils currently in the school. Your rigorous assessment and tracking has identified some disadvantaged pupils need help to catch up. You are therefore also targeting resources towards this group in line with plans in your pupil premium strategy. The governing body will need to evaluate how effective these actions are so that the gap in attainment between your disadvantaged pupils and their peers narrows further.
- You and other leaders are firmly focused on ensuring that all pupils make the best-possible progress and benefit from a well-rounded education. You provide a varied and stimulating curriculum that develops pupils academically and personally. Your curriculum ensures that pupils broaden their understanding of their locality and region through, for example, visits to different places of worship and through the study of local history and geography. I found pupils to be happy, sociable, respectful and polite throughout the day. Parents and carers who made their views known are overwhelmingly happy with the way in which the school is led and managed and with the quality of teaching their children receive.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- gaps in attainment between different groups of pupils are narrowed and that additional support provided to help pupils catch up is consistently effective

- the impact of actions within the school's pupil premium strategy are systematically checked and evaluated to ensure that this additional funding fully achieves its purpose.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you and your deputy headteacher to discuss the effectiveness of the school and its leadership and management. I also met with the chair of the governing body and two other governors, two teachers, your parent support adviser and a group of pupils. In addition, I met with your subject leaders for literacy and mathematics to scrutinise some pupils' books. You and I jointly observed teaching, learning and assessment in classes across the school. I reviewed school documentation including your self-evaluation and plans for improvement, policies, assessment information, safeguarding information and attendance data. I observed pupils' behaviour around the school at social times and talked to pupils informally across the day. I also took account of responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil survey and to parents' responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.