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Mr G Newman
Skelton School
Skelton
Penrith
Cumbria
CA11 9SE

Dear Mr Newman

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Skelton School

Following my visit to your school on 28 March 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about outcomes for pupils at the school.

Evidence

During the inspection I met with you, school leaders and members of staff. I spoke to four members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. I also spoke to a representative from the local authority by telephone. We visited all classes and had the opportunity to speak to pupils and see their work. Our visit concentrated on pupils' learning in phonics, writing and mathematics and I listened to a number of pupils read. I met with groups of pupils during the day and talked with them about their views on learning, teaching and behaviour.

I scrutinised your evaluation of the 2016 outcomes and the checks you make on the progress of current pupils. I also looked at your school improvement planning, the checks you make on the attainment of pupils, the single central record and other safeguarding documents. There were 33 responses to Parent View. I spoke with a number of parents at the school gate and took account of the 22 parental text comments.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the judgements and strengths remain the same as at your last inspection.

Context

Skelton is much smaller than the average-sized primary school. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The numbers of pupils from minority ethnic groups and pupils who speak English as an additional language are lower than the national average. The proportion of pupils who receive special educational needs support or have an education, health and care plan is below average. More pupils join the school at different times of the year compared to other schools nationally. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is also much lower than average.

This inspection was in response to a decline in outcomes at the end of key stage 2 in 2016, particularly in writing. This Year 6 cohort had just 12 pupils and a very small number of pupils were receiving additional support for their learning, social and emotional needs.

You and your staff have carried out a detailed analysis of the reasons why a small minority of pupils did not achieve the outcomes expected for their age. You identified a number of very specific reasons relating to individual pupils. It is clear why these pupils did not reach the standards expected of them. You also identified that not all pupils were able to spell accurately in their own writing, despite achieving the expected standards in the national spelling test. In addition, a small group of pupils who struggled with spelling also struggled with understanding the vocabulary within comprehension questions and within written problems in mathematics. This slowed their progress. As a result, no pupils were working at greater depth in writing at the end of key stage 2 in 2016 and fewer pupils than expected were working at greater depth in reading and mathematics.

During the inspection, I saw evidence that your swift actions to tackle the 2016 decline are impacting positively on the progress of current pupils. You have made effective changes to the teaching of spelling to ensure consistency. Evidence in pupils' work shows clear application of skills. Spellings are accurate and any misconceptions are tackled quickly. Homework is used to reinforce the work carried out in school and parents say that pupils are eager to learn their spellings. A pupil in key stage 1 was very proud of spelling the word 'beautiful' correctly during the spelling quiz. She told me that, 'I got it wrong in my writing yesterday so I practised it last night for the quiz'. Pupils showed me the improvement in their spelling skills, both in tests and in their written work. They are proud of their achievements and rise to the challenges and high expectations set by the adults in the school.

Pupils spoke confidently about the changes you have made to the teaching of writing. They say that being able to talk about what they want to write, planning the structure of the writing and the words they want to use, is improving the quality of their work. They recognise that by extending their knowledge of vocabulary they are also improving the quality of the books they read and their understanding of challenging text. During the inspection, I saw older pupils performing part of a Shakespeare play, 'The Tempest', in preparation for a performance with other

schools at the 'Theatre by the Lake' later in the year. Parents commented that such opportunities were building pupils' confidence and ability to articulate clearly when reading aloud. Your most recent assessments for pupils in Year 6 indicate that a higher proportion of pupils are reading at a greater depth and have made good progress from their starting points.

Although pupils' outcomes in mathematics remained above the national average, you have acknowledged that there was a decline in outcomes in 2016. You identified that pupils did not have the instant recall of number and multiplication facts, which was slowing down progress. To address this, you have changed the way you teach mathematics across the school. Teachers quickly identify gaps in pupils' learning and correct any misconceptions. Individual feedback and support ensure that pupils' needs are met swiftly. Pupils can see the progress they have made and understand why it is important to know their times tables. One child told me, 'Once you know it, it's just there in your head and you can just do it.' Other pupils could explain the processes they go through to solve complex problems. They enjoy new learning and challenges. They know what to do if they are unsure and appreciate the way that teachers explain things to them when they are struggling. They say that feedback from adults helps them to improve their work. Your most recent assessment information for pupils in Year 6 indicates that an increased number of pupils are working at a greater depth in mathematics.

Pupils' outcomes in the phonics screening check in Year 1 remained above average in 2016. However, there was an increase in the small proportion of pupils not meeting the expected standard. There were only six pupils in the class. Staff have identified the reasons why not all pupils passed the test. The Year 1 teacher knows the pupils very well and this allows her to assess effectively and to challenge and support individuals. As a result, current pupils are making strong progress. I read with a number of pupils during the inspection. Younger pupils were able to use their phonic skills effectively, persevered with more-challenging words, read with increasing confidence and fluency and could answer questions about the story. Pupils are making stronger progress from their starting points as a result of the high-quality support they receive, including through additional special needs funding.

The outcomes for pupils at the end of key stage 1 in 2016 were above average. Nonetheless, you acknowledge that outcomes were not as high as they have been in previous years. Through detailed analysis you are able to explain the specific reasons why a small minority of pupils did not reach the expected standards. You have swiftly implemented additional support for these pupils in key stage 2. Parents reported how supportive the school is in ensuring that pupils settle well when they arrive at school. Parents appreciate the help given by you and your staff and how quickly you access additional support from outside agencies when necessary. My observations confirm that your timely interventions are having a positive impact on outcomes.

Governors have closely monitored your progress in tackling the reasons behind the decline in outcomes in 2016. They have a clear understanding of the school's priorities. Governors have confidence in the ability of you and your staff to make the improvements necessary and to ensure that the pupils are 'confident, capable learners in a caring community stretching minds, bodies and horizons.'

External support

The local authority provides light-touch support to your school and has confidence in you to tackle the reasons for the decline in outcomes in 2016. As a school, you are actively involved with the Rural Penrith cluster of 11 schools and you lead the organisation of this group. You and your staff work closely with partner schools to share good practice and training opportunities, particularly in the teaching of writing in key stage 2. Staff work together to check teachers' assessment of pupils' work to ensure that high standards are maintained. Your links with the local secondary school allow Year 6 and Year 7 staff to work together to ensure that pupils continue to make progress when they join Year 7.

Priorities for further improvement

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers build on the existing successful work to improve pupils' spelling, knowledge and understanding of vocabulary.

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

Yours sincerely

Amanda Stringer
Her Majesty's Inspector