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Ms Pip Fairweather
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Dear Ms Fairweather

Short inspection of Ashington CofE First 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 September 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You took up your post in April 2015. Together with your deputy headteacher and middle leaders, you make a strong leadership team.

As the school has been growing into a primary school, due to be complete by September 2017, you have worked hard to make sure that learning has not been affected and pupils continue to achieve well. The attention given to pupils' personal development and welfare ensures that pupils leave the school as mature and confident young people. Most parents value the work of the school. One parent said that the work the school had done with their child was 'priceless' and that 'this school has an amazing staff team'. You have created a cohesive staff, ensuring that teachers and teaching assistants have regular opportunities to learn from each other and from staff in other schools. This open approach to improving practice means that staff are well placed to ensure that pupils learn effectively.

Leaders and teachers set high expectations for pupils. They take time to promote a caring ethos and ensure that pupils learn in a stimulating environment. Leaders are determined to provide the highest quality education through their knowledge of each pupil, quickly recognising when further support is required to help pupils achieve well. Teachers waste no opportunity to inform pupils how they can improve their work. They celebrate their achievements and challenge their thinking. Pupils confirm that they enjoy school and feel that they are valued and always helped.

However, as you acknowledge, there are times when some of the most able pupils are not sufficiently challenged, which means that they do not make the progress from their starting points of which they are capable. Pupils' writing is not quite as strong as their reading and mathematical skills.

Steps taken to tackle the areas for improvement from the previous inspection have been successful. In particular, you have ensured that pupils make far better progress in mathematics than in the past. You have strengthened pupils' ability to apply their knowledge and understanding of mathematics and their reasoning skills when tackling a range of problems and investigations. Pupils now have a deep knowledge of other cultures and religions through a range of well-planned opportunities to learn about other people.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are effective and the detailed records are of high quality. As the designated safeguarding leads, you and your deputy attend regular training and then cascade this information to all staff appropriately. Governors provide good support to the school and check that the school meets statutory safeguarding requirements. For example, the governor with responsibility for safeguarding scrutinises checks made on those who work and volunteer at the school. Appropriate risk assessments are in place and regular monitoring occurs to ensure the safety and well-being of pupils on the school site and when visiting places beyond the school grounds.

Pupils say that they feel safe because they know who to talk to if they have a problem. They state that staff will always help them. This was a view echoed by parents spoken to during the inspection. Leaders are clear that giving high priority to pupils' well-being is fundamental in creating a caring school within a Christian context. Pupils frequently use the 'Prayer Pails' to express their concerns and hopes for change.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on: how well the school is helping boys to reach a good level of development in the early years and improve their phonics skills, how well leaders are monitoring pupils' progress in mathematics, the school's work to promote higher standards in reading and in writing, and the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, especially those who are persistently absent.
- Teachers in the early years plan learning that is exciting and challenging. Children talk about how much fun they have in lessons. For example, a pupil spoke excitedly of his tractor design, the details he had included and why they were important. Children's progress is rapid and a higher proportion than before, including boys, are already reaching a good level of development.
- Phonics is taught effectively alongside writing. Teachers plan specific opportunities related to pupils' interests, including boys, and use engaging reminders, for example when helping pupils to practise forming their letters effectively. Carefully planned activities enable pupils to learn well and apply their

knowledge in a range of contexts. As a result, both boys and girls as well as those pupils who need to catch up are achieving well.

- Leaders have a good understanding of pupils' progress and standard of work in mathematics compared to national averages. They use a wide variety of strategies to check that pupils are learning well. They have also ensured that where pupils fall behind, they are supported well by appropriately trained members of staff. Leaders check thoroughly that additional support is effective. For example, the impact of an additional mathematics programme in Year 2 has ensured that pupils who were unsure of place value have caught up quickly.
- Leaders have put in place appropriate and successful measures to ensure that pupils make good progress in mathematics. For example, there is a school-wide approach to ensure that pupils use their mathematical skills across a range of contexts. Consequently, work in books, as well as the school's own assessments, shows that pupils are reaching higher standards than seen in the 2016 teacher assessments.
- More middle-attaining pupils are now reaching age-related expectations in reading by the end of Year 1, Year 2 and as they move into key stage 2. This is because the school uses additional learning opportunities and time successfully to improve pupils' reading skills. This support continues as pupils move through the school. For example, a small group of Year 2 pupils were observed exploring and quickly gaining a secure grasp of early reading skills as they tested their knowledge of phonics.
- Pupils who need to catch up are making good progress in writing because they are given regular help to improve the quality of their work. Teachers model good-quality writing and encourage pupils to use similar features in their own work. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well when writing because teachers identify gaps in learning and intervene to provide tailored additional help.
- Your senior leadership team correctly identified weaknesses in pupils' understanding of grammar, punctuation and spelling in Year 2 pupils' assessments. Consequently, too few pupils reached the required standard in writing in the 2016 teacher assessments at the end of key stage 1. Teachers now tackle these errors consistently and pupils' writing is of a typically high quality.
- The progress that pupils' make in writing is not, however, as rapid as it is in reading and mathematics. This is because pupils do not have enough opportunities to develop their ability to write at length or at greater depth.
- Leaders recognise that the most able pupils are not consistently challenged to tackle work that is hard enough. Sometimes, they spend too much time on what they already know which slows their learning.
- Pupils' attendance is similar to the national average. In the past, however, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils has been low. Systems that are in place to keep checks on the absence of individuals and groups of pupils are effective. Your detailed records show there has been an improvement in the attendance for this group of pupils which is helping them to achieve well. Other groups of pupils also attend regularly.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers provide challenging work aimed at stretching the most able pupils to reach the highest standards
- pupils make more rapid progress in writing.

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

Yours sincerely

Richard Blackmore
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you to agree lines of enquiry, discuss the progress the school has made since the last inspection and the quality of safeguarding. I met with four governors and had a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. I observed learning in classes and looked through some of the work in pupils' books from across the school. I examined a range of documents relating to safeguarding, pupils' attendance and leaders' self-evaluation of the school's effectiveness and their plans for school development. I took account of 48 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the views of several parents as they collected their children at the end of the school day.