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Mrs Lynne Wade
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Dear Mrs Wade

Short inspection of Kirkby Stephen Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 9 May 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 March 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Following the closure of local nursery provision, you responded very rapidly to the local authority's request to extend the age range of the school and include a Nursery class from September 2015. This has had a very positive impact on making sure that young children receive a good start to their education and that a higher than average proportion of children are well prepared to enter Year 1 by the end of the Reception class. Parents appreciate how well staff in early years care for their children. They typically comment on the way staff help children gain confidence and feel comfortable in their stimulating indoor and outdoor learning environments.

Your school is popular in the local area and the number of pupils on roll is increasing. Consequently, you have made plans to build an additional classroom to be ready for September 2017 and are actively raising funds for this. The response from the local community has been extremely generous, indicating that people value the school's good quality of education and wish to sustain this into the future.

Reading continues to be a strength of the school because you have successfully tackled the dip in reading outcomes seen in the 2016 end of key stage 2 test. During the inspection, a group of Year 5 pupils explained to me that they frequently read for pleasure at home as well as in the daily sessions in school. They proudly recited poems – either from memory or reading from books – with expression and a real sense of audience, demonstrating their increasingly mature comprehension

skills.

Leaders have designed a curriculum that harnesses the resources and rich cultural heritage of the local area. Building on children's experiences, you have developed topics around, for example, farming and the development of railways during the Victorian era. You enrich pupils' learning with outdoor learning in the 'forest school' and with visits to interesting places such as the Centre for Life in Newcastle. Investigative science is a real strength of your school. Displays and work in pupils' books show that pupils frequently undertake interesting practical activities that help them develop their skills in scientific enquiry. In Year 2, for example, pupils were growing plants from dried peas and bird seed under a variety of different conditions and then writing a plant diary to record their observations.

Leaders ensure that there is coverage of all subjects within the national curriculum but pupils' progress is not consistently good across all areas in key stage 2. Topic work gives many opportunities for pupils to practise their skills in reading, writing and mathematics for a range of purposes, but does not always support them in systematically building on their skills, knowledge and understanding in history and geography.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding procedures are firmly established in the school and there is a real sense that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Opportunities within the curriculum support pupils in learning how to keep themselves safe, for example pupils learn about e-safety and that there are many different forms of bullying, all of which are harmful and will not be tolerated in school.

Governors make regular checks in relation to safeguarding procedures, including making sure that the systems in place to ensure that pupils cannot access inappropriate materials on the internet are effective. Pupils report that they feel safe and almost all parents agree.

Training for staff is up to date and reviewed at least annually. Likewise, the school's policies and information meet the requirements of 'Keeping children safe in education' (2016). Consequently, you and your leaders, including governors, have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are robust and records are appropriately detailed.

Inspection findings

- Pupils continue to make good progress as they move through the school in reading, writing and mathematics. In the 2016 national test outcomes, pupils' progress in reading was less strong than in writing and mathematics. You explained to me how the new testing arrangements last year were unfamiliar to pupils and staff and this meant that pupils did not do quite so well in the reading test when faced with some of the higher-level questions. You showed how teachers have responded to this by giving pupils more practice in developing

these skills through their guided reading sessions. You have also introduced reading challenges that motivate pupils to read even more extensively. Through sampling pupils' work in literacy books in key stage 2, I could see that this has already had a positive impact and pupils are increasingly confident in tackling more searching questions.

- You have recently introduced a new system to check on pupils' learning and progress as they move through the school. The system is effective because it enables teachers to identify any gaps in pupils' learning and to take immediate action to prevent them falling behind. Equally it shows where pupils are ready to take on more complex tasks and activities to extend their thinking and deepen their understanding.
- Teachers make good use of this information and samples from books show that most-able pupils are expected to demonstrate greater depth and understanding in their work. This confirms your success in addressing the area for improvement identified in the last inspection report regarding making sure that most-able pupils 'move quickly to work that is hard enough for them'.
- Leaders and governors ensure that disadvantaged pupils are well supported to reach their full potential in reading, writing and mathematics. Work sampled during the inspection showed that teachers' careful planning on an individual basis for the progress of this group of pupils means that they achieve well from their individual starting points.
- For those disadvantaged pupils who are among the most able, you promote their confidence and self-esteem through enabling them to access the full range of trips and visits and supporting them when they are ready to move on to secondary education.
- The curriculum you have designed for children in the early years and key stage 1 is just right for their needs across the full range of subjects. Classrooms are hives of activity, buzzing with purposeful, practical learning opportunities that engage pupils' interest and motivate them to learn as much as they can.
- In key stage 2, pupils build on this strong foundation and continue to make good progress in reading, writing, mathematics and science. Pupils' progress in history and geography is less rapid. This is because you have not yet securely anchored a specific, systematic focus on how pupils will develop skills, knowledge and understanding in these subjects within your curriculum plans.
- Pupils in key stage 2 learn Spanish through a range of activities, including singing and simple games. Currently they do not have enough opportunities for writing in Spanish and developing their skills in basic grammar in this language. Leaders are aware of this and are seeking additional expertise to improve teaching in this subject.
- Pupils are proud of their school and say that Kirkby Stephen Primary is a good school because the teachers make learning interesting and are friendly and kind. Pupils said that teachers 'sometimes tell you off, but only if you are naughty', indicating their view that teachers are fair. Pupils are enthusiastic learners and attendance is above average. Most parents are very happy with the school, although responses to the online survey indicate that a very few parents of pupils

in key stage 2 would like to have more information on their children's progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the curriculum is developed to build systematically on pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding across a wider range of subjects in key stage 2, so that progress in history, geography and Spanish is consistently as strong as it is in reading, writing, mathematics and science.

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

Janette Corlett
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher and with six members of the governing body. I spoke to a representative of the local authority. You, the deputy headteacher and I visited classes to observe learning and we looked at work in pupils' books. I met with a group of six Year 5 pupils to talk about their reading and spoke to 11 parents at the school gates. I considered 56 responses to the online parent survey, including free-text comments. I also considered the 19 responses to the online staff questionnaire. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including that relating to assessment, school self-evaluation, school improvement planning, attendance, the single central record and other safeguarding procedures and practices.