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Miss Karen O'Donnell
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Dear Miss O'Donnell

Short inspection of Sherburn in Elmet, Athelstan Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 5 October 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 January 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your excellent leadership has ensured that the school continues to go from strength to strength. It is testament to your dedication and hard work, and that of your team, that teaching and learning have remained of high quality throughout the extensive building programme. Outcomes are improving, particularly for younger children. Your evaluation of the school's work being good with outstanding elements is aligned with the local authority's view and, indeed, the findings in this inspection. Pupils enjoy a rich and exciting curriculum, further enhanced by visits and visitors who capture their interest and engage them in new activities. Pupils work hard and are proud of their school. The vast majority of parents and carers have full confidence in the school's work to help their children to be happy in their learning and keep safe. An overwhelming number were full of praise for how successfully leaders have ensured that good communication, stability in learning and safety of pupils have been paramount as the transition to the new building has taken place this term.

Since the last inspection, you have worked tirelessly to raise the standard of teaching and pupils' achievement throughout school. The school's aim to 'be the best that we can be' is exemplified by pupils, staff and governors. You have addressed areas identified for improvement at the last inspection, as well as the few aspects of teaching that have not been good enough. Governors have provided clear support and appropriate challenge to school improvement.

The leadership of the school has recently been further strengthened by the internal appointments of key stage leaders. You know that this will provide further opportunities for direction that is more precise and support to teachers for improvement. In addition, the new lead teacher for English has made a positive start in her role. You have rightly identified that spelling throughout school needs further improvement. The leader is astutely aware of what needs to be done to improve spelling outcomes. She has a plan of action that explains in detail what teachers and teaching assistants need to do to support pupils in class. It is early days, but the direction to pupils is already coming through in pupils' work. Pupils are able to talk about the different strategies teachers are showing them which help them apply accurate spellings to their written work. There are high expectations from teachers in lessons and in homework. Pupils are starting to respond to the teachers' higher challenge in spelling, for example in making sure that they spell accurately those words that are 'non-negotiables' for their year group.

Actions taken to address historical underperformance in phonics have been successful. The proportion of pupils achieving the Year 1 phonics standard has risen, and has been in line with the national average for the last two years. Leaders have revised the way that phonics is taught through key stage 1. There has been a greater emphasis on establishing phonics strategies and routines in the early years. The result of this can be seen in current Year 1 classes. Most pupils are accurately sounding and applying their phonics skills to their reading and writing. New reading books have been introduced which relate directly to pupils' current learning and help them test out their skills. You already run additional sessions for pupils who find this work more difficult. You are aware that these pupils need specific guidance and support to help them reach the national standard.

At the last inspection, you were tasked with developing the quality of teaching by supporting teachers in showing pupils how to improve. Pupils' work from last year and their current books show that they are given clear guidance in the next steps they need to take. Teachers have a good understanding of the national expectations and frequently challenge pupils to develop their skills further in lessons. Pupils are encouraged to edit and improve their own work and, sometimes, that of their peers. This has given most pupils more confidence to speak about their learning and to take more responsibility for upgrading their work. As a result, the progress that they make is generally more rapid. You agree that, while there are clear improvements overall, the progress the most able pupils make through key stage 2 could be even better.

Actions taken to improve the quality of provision in the early years are apparent as soon as you enter the early years classrooms. Children get a great start to school, and for some children this is now from the age of two. The calm and stimulating indoor and outdoor areas are full of purposeful activities. The sunshine Reception classes are particularly rich in language and mathematical opportunities. Careful consideration has been given to how to support the lower speech and language skills that a number of children enter school with. As mentioned earlier, phonics is high profile.

Safeguarding is effective.

The effective systems that leaders have put in place to keep pupils safe have been further developed and strengthened during the long-term school building project. At all times, the safety of the whole-school community has been the top priority. The efficiency and excellent organisation of the school business manager have been key in this work. She has communicated daily with the site contractors and school team to address any necessary changes in organisation. The contractors have led sessions with the pupils, teaching them about building site safety and work opportunities within the building industry. This thorough work has meant that the only impact of the building programme on pupils has been a positive one.

As the safeguarding lead, you take responsibility for ensuring that safeguarding arrangements and systems are fit for purpose. You make sure that all staff and volunteers have the appropriate training in safeguarding. Staff have a clear understanding of how to identify and report concerns. Where pupils may be at risk, thorough records show that you take prompt action, working successfully with external agencies where appropriate.

Pupils were able to explain a large number of activities they take part in that help them learn how to keep safe. They were very clear about key messages they have been given to support them in keeping safe online. They say that a few pupils in school have experienced bullying online and that they now feel much better equipped to know how to deal with this if it happens. All the pupils spoken to said that they were not aware of any bullying taking place within school, but that if it did, they would be confident to speak to any member of staff about it. They mentioned the calm and helpful care they had received from staff such as the pastoral leader.

Inspection findings

- One of the areas I wanted to look at during the inspection was how well teachers support the higher-ability pupils in reaching higher standards. This is because the national data for 2016 and 2017 shows that the progress that these pupils made from the end of key stage 1 to the end of key stage 2 was not as strong as the progress made by their peers. You gave very clear evidence for some of the reasons around this for last year's Year 6 pupils. Pupils' current work throughout key stage 2 shows good teacher direction to working within higher standards. Pupils' work and school assessment information confirm that higher-ability pupils in most year groups are making good progress. You agree that your team will keep careful checks on this to make sure that this stronger progress continues and the improvement is better reflected in the end-of-year outcomes.
- Leaders say that rich experiences across a wide curriculum are a strength of the school, and they are right. Pupils are given opportunities to learn and try out new skills across an exciting, wide range of activities. High on the pupils' list of their view of strengths of the school were the trips and visits they take part in as well as the visitors and events that come into school. Pupils and parents talked about the inspiring visits this term from Maasai warriors and flamenco dancers. Pupils

have been taught about and had a go at these two very different styles of dancing. Pupils in Year 6 were keen to share their research and writing about a person who had inspired them. Pupils had chosen a wide variety of people who have influenced them, such as actors, musicians and sportspeople. Pupils' high-quality art work is already starting to make the new building feel like home.

- I was interested to see how you evaluate the school and decide on the priorities for improvement. You have made sure that you and your staff are crystal-clear about the demands of the national standards. You have strong, positive relationships with other schools you work in partnership with or support. Your involvement with the Sherburn, Tadcaster and Rural (STAR) Learning Alliance provides a two-way process for the sharing of ideas and expertise. This collaboration is effective in enabling you to share your own school's strengths, gain ideas from others and check the quality of the work you are doing. You have valued the termly checks and support from your local authority improvement adviser.
- You are constantly refining your systems for checking the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Your annual plan, which leaders of all aspects of school contribute to, makes it absolutely clear what work needs to go on across the year and when it will happen. Checks that leaders make on learning and the quality of pupils' work have a clear purpose. Evaluations made include precise actions that fully support staff in knowing what they can do to help pupils improve.
- Governors demonstrate a thorough, organised and informed approach to their role in checking the success of leaders' work. They use detailed information from school leaders, the local authority adviser and reviews from the STAR alliance partners to direct their questions and evaluations. There is a good understanding of the school finances and how well particular aspects of funding are used to impact directly on specific pupils' outcomes. Some governors are able to spend time checking the success of the school's work directly with the pupils, visiting classes and supporting them in activities, such as residential trips.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the clear plans for continued improvement of the new learning environment and the strengthened leadership result in increasing numbers of pupils reaching the expected and higher standards in every year group.

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

Yours sincerely

Kate Rowley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

At the time of the inspection, the school's four-year building project was just being completed. The school had moved into the new classrooms at the start of September 2017.

During this one-day inspection, we spent time together with your deputy in classrooms and looking at the quality of pupils' work. We discussed your evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. We looked at the success of the actions you and your team have taken. I held discussions with five members of your governing body and had a separate meeting with the local authority area adviser. I met with the school business manager, the leader of early years and the English leader. I spoke to pupils about their learning and looked through their work with them. I listened to pupils read. I spoke to parents before school started and took into account letters and the 55 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. The responses from 35 staff to the staff survey and 34 pupils to the pupils' questionnaire were also considered. I reviewed a number of school documents, including the written evaluation of the school's work, documents relating to checks on the quality of teaching and learning, school assessment information, a range of policies and safeguarding information.