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Miss Helen Pemberton
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Pemberton

Short inspection of Sir John Barrow School

Following my visit to the school on 14 November 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 October 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You have a real passion for your school and you have worked diligently and with vigour to ensure that the high standards in the school have been maintained. A strong sense of teamwork pervades the whole school and ensures that everyone feels valued and enjoy being part of the Sir John Barrow community.

Teachers have worked successfully to sustain previous strengths as well as adjusting their practice in line with current national changes. Senior leaders have relished the opportunity to take on leadership roles and middle leaders are developing their responsibilities to monitor subjects.

Senior leaders have planned a broad curriculum. However, teachers do not always ensure that sufficient time is given to all subjects and as a result some subjects are given less attention and are hastily delivered.

Pupils make good progress. Children start school with skills that are slightly below that expected for their age and by the end of Year 6 a higher percentage than the national average leave school at the expected standard for reading, writing and mathematics. A growing percentage of pupils are working above the standard expected for their age in key stages 1 and 2.

Children get off to a good start in early years. Teachers have a good understanding of the needs of their children and provide exciting learning opportunities. One excited comment included, 'I've made a shield, you can hold it up with the handle at the back.' Children show sustained concentration and interest.

Behaviour is excellent. Pupils conduct themselves extremely well. They are polite, well-mannered and very welcoming. Pupils are very proud of their school, they say that there is no bullying, but they are confident that senior leaders would deal with issues if they were to arise.

Parents are supportive of the school. A number of parents commented that they were happy with the school. One typical comment from a parent was: 'My children have excellent teachers who really go the extra mile to make sure they succeed'.

Leaders and governors have addressed the areas for improvement at the last inspection. Teaching is consistently good across the school. The teaching of mathematics has improved. Pupils are given opportunities to develop basic skills and to use them to solve problems. As a result, a greater proportion of pupils are now achieving higher levels.

Inspectors also asked leaders to develop the role of middle leaders. These leaders are now given the opportunity to observe lessons and review the work in books. As a result they are aware of the progress that pupils make, particularly in English and mathematics.

Governors work extremely hard for the school, they have a wide range of skills and are extremely committed to the role. They are good at holding you and other leaders to account, by asking timely and valuable questions and ensuring that they regularly visit school and talk to leaders. Leaders and governors are aware that strategic plans to help the school improve further need to be more bespoke to the school, making it clear how success is to be measured.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is effective. You and your office manager have ensured that robust procedures are in place to ensure that all pupils are kept safe. The governing body take their safeguarding role very seriously, ensuring that every member of staff is appropriately trained and aware of their duties to safeguard pupils.

Pupils say that they feel safe. They understand that there is someone they can talk to if they have a problem and they are sure that staff will help them. They value the 'kidsafe' lessons that they receive and know that these lessons help them keep safe in a variety of situations, including on the internet.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection we agreed some key lines of enquiry. First, we discussed the progress of boys in reading and writing across key stage 1 over the

last two years. Lessons are interesting and there are many opportunities for pupils to write at length and to practise comprehension skills in reading. The school's data and a review of books show that boys make good progress, with more working at and above the level expected for their age in key stage 1. A higher proportion of boys are now on track to reach the expected standard at the end of Year 2.

- We also looked at the attendance of pupils and in particular the persistent absence of some disadvantaged pupils. You have been tenacious in your drive to improve attendance and this has been highly successful. Alongside the education welfare officer, you have tracked and monitored attendance very effectively. This has ensured that there has been a dramatic rise in the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and currently attendance for these pupils is good.
- You also wanted to look at the progress in writing of all pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You have introduced a range of strategies to improve standards of writing across the school. For example, pupils are given opportunities to write more often and in other subjects. Evidence in books shows that writing is of a high standard in every year group and there are high expectations. Children write in a variety of genres, they use a range of sentence openers, good vocabulary, good presentation and improving spelling. Progress for all groups in writing is at least good.
- Lastly we looked at the opportunities to study the wider curriculum beyond English and mathematics. A broad curriculum is planned. It is enhanced by a number of trips and visits, which pupils enjoy. Evidence in books and on display shows that there is a difference in the amount of time given to particular subjects in each year group. You are aware there is too much variation in the quantity and quality of work in some subjects and that sufficient time needs to be given to every subject.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- plans for school improvement are bespoke to the needs of the school and success is easy to measure
- all subjects of the curriculum are given sufficient time to be taught effectively.

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

Emma Jackson
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you and other members of staff, including the deputy headteacher, early years leader and key stage 1 leader. I also met with members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. I met with pupils in a meeting and talked to some in lessons.

I took account of responses to the online questionnaires for parents and staff. I visited classrooms to observe pupils' learning and looked at their work in books. I reviewed information about pupils' progress and attainment. I scrutinised the school's self-evaluation document and school improvement plan and looked at safeguarding, including evaluating the impact of the school's procedures and policies to keep pupils safe. I also looked at the school's website and curriculum plans.