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Mrs Jane Farraday
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Dear Mrs Farraday

Short inspection of Levens CofE School

Following my visit to the school on 22 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 May 2014.

This school continues to be good.

You and the leadership team have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Strong leadership is clearly evident in the school by yourself and the governing body. Since taking up your position in 2015, your commitment and devotion to the pupils and their parents are highly valued, and you are seen as a champion for each and every child within the school.

You have accurately evaluated its strengths and areas for improvement. Where areas for improvement have been identified, you have been quick to act and move the school forward, for example analysing quickly and effectively the school's data to ensure that teaching is tightly focused and well planned. This has meant that the key strengths from the previous inspection have been maintained.

The governing body is a strength of the school. Governors drive strategic direction as well as offering day-to-day practical support. They take great pride in the community feel of the school and have been quick to support you with improving the school further, for example releasing you from your class teaching commitment to ensure that you can robustly develop teaching across the school.

Parents speak of overwhelming support for the school. Parents praised how teachers use their 'special skills' to draw out highly positive attitudes from their children towards their school work. Relationships between teachers and pupils are built on a genuine desire to succeed. Pupils in the school are extremely happy,

confident and courteous. During the inspection, pupils were highly engaged in their learning and behaved well. The new behaviour policy and its tighter monitoring that you developed since the last inspection have had clear impact.

The school was asked, in May 2014, to challenge pupils in mathematics so that they were clearly aware of their next steps. You and other teachers have worked hard to develop this aspect. Pupils confidently talk about their learning. They know their next steps and are not afraid to challenge their thinking.

You have also developed systems within the school to track and monitor the progress that pupils make, especially the most able. You and other leaders have a thorough, accurate and detailed knowledge of the attainment and progress of pupils. This is through very good use of assessment information. The quality of pupils' work has improved, and the progress that they make in key stage 2, particularly in writing, has risen rapidly.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding pupils is a high priority and a strength of the school. You and the staff have established a culture of vigilance in the school. You know your community and pupils well, and all staff understand that safeguarding is everybody's responsibility. Information is used to support and guide families. You have good systems to share information with other agencies and rapidly respond to families' needs. This has resulted in highly effective support for pupils within the school.

You have developed good systems to train and update staff on any changes to safeguarding. This helps build and maintain your vigilant, caring culture. Documentation is thorough, detailed and comprehensive. Staff were able to discuss systems in detail, and were highly aware, and extremely knowledgeable in their understanding, of how to keep pupils safe.

Inspection findings

- In this inspection, I focused my time on three different aspects. First, I looked at how learning in the early years and key stage 1 was meeting the needs of the pupils. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development at the end of the early years in 2016 dipped slightly, and pupils' attainment in key stage 1 writing and mathematics also dipped in 2016 and 2017. During my visit, you shared with me that in 2017 there had been a greater proportion of children reaching a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year. Pupils' work and the school's assessments now indicate that children are making good progress in the early years and in key stage 1. You have taken advice and guidance from external specialists, which is beginning to have a positive impact on the quality of provision.
- During the inspection, I observed how children made particularly good progress in their communication, listening and attention skills. They used language to develop their imagination and, subsequently, their writing skills. For example,

pupils created posters to help hedgehogs safely cross the road. However, when they are not working with adults, children do not make gains in their knowledge or their skills as quickly as they could. This is because some of the activities within the early years are not challenging enough, nor do they promote evidently their skills. You have already started to change the provision to develop the ability of children to learn productively on their own.

- You have made improvements to the quality of the outdoor provision in the early years, providing wider learning opportunities within the curriculum. The next step is to develop the level of challenge for independent learning across both the indoor and the outdoor provision.
- I then focused on pupils' use of phonics. The proportion of pupils who gained the phonics check in 2016 matched the national average. However, the phonics results in 2017 took a dip. Teaching is developing in this area and you rightly identified this an area for improvement this year. When listening to pupils read, most confidently sounded out words and used a variety of reading strategies to help them when they were stuck.
- However, some pupils' attainment is limited in early reading because they do not have work that is well matched to their needs. Some pupils find their work too easy. You have already identified this issue. You are providing staff with training to develop their skills in phonics teaching to ensure that there is increased rigour when pupils learn sounds and the letters that they make.
- For my third focus, I looked at why the school was so successful in developing writing at key stage 2, and how well teachers provide opportunities for pupils to write across the range of other subjects. There has been a clear, consistent process for developing writing across the school. Teachers have been sharply focused in their work and are clear about the expectations for the end of each year group. Teachers know each pupil's ability well and accurately track how well pupils are doing. They are able to precisely focus on the next steps individual pupils need to take to move on in their learning.
- There are also many opportunities for pupils to use and extend their writing skills across the curriculum. Pupils make good use of subject-specific vocabulary. Pupils use their ideas to construct well-crafted, accurate and informative pieces of writing. Pupils are given real purposes for writing and, as a result, the curriculum is having a positive impact on improving pupils' writing.
- Finally, at the start of the inspection, the information published on the website did not meet requirements. By the end of the inspection, the missing information had been discussed and seen. Governors have developed an audit for checking the school's website. This was due to be reported back to the governors at their next full governing body meeting.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils in the early years and in key stage 1 have greater challenge when they work on their own to further enhance the quality of their independent learning
- plans to improve the consistency and rigour of phonics teaching are further embedded.

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

Yours sincerely

James Blackwell
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection, I met with you, senior leaders, two members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. We conducted a series of short visits to lessons and I had the opportunity to speak with pupils and see their work. I also listened to a number of pupils read. As part of the inspection, I spoke with parents at the school gates and took account of free-text comments from the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, and the staff and pupils' questionnaires. I scrutinised your assessment information, school improvement planning, the single central record and other safeguarding procedures and practices.