

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



22 January 2018

Mrs Ruth Gittins
Acting headteacher
Newcastle CofE Primary School
Church Road
Newcastle
Shropshire
SY7 8QL

Dear Mrs Gittins

Short inspection of Newcastle CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 9 January 2018, 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

You and the governors have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment in 2014, you have dedicated yourself to ensuring that all pupils in this small school receive a high-quality education. You have built a close-knit and effective team whose members all share your dedication to the school. Your passion and commitment to providing pupils with wide and varied learning experiences in this rural setting should be applauded. Pupils benefit from a rich and varied curriculum, which enables them to become well-rounded individuals who are very well prepared for the next stage of their education by the end of Year 6.

You understand the community in which the school is set exceptionally well, and recognise the importance of working closely within the community. Pupils benefit from community support in activities such as the summer fair, but also the community benefits from the participation of pupils in events such as the local carol service and harvest festival. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. All parents who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire say they would recommend the school. As one parent said, 'It is a great little school with a family atmosphere, which manages to teach several year groups as one effectively.'

Pupils value their school immensely. They are extremely proud to be part of the school and say they like being in a small school 'because you get to know everyone's personality'. Pupils also demonstrate great maturity.

They recognise the benefits of joining the recently formed Blue Hills federation,

such as having further opportunities to attend trips, wider sporting opportunities and working with pupils from other schools.

At the time of the last inspection, you were asked to ensure that teachers provide appropriate work for the wide range of abilities within the classes, especially for the most able. This has been successfully achieved. Teachers plan carefully to ensure that appropriate challenge is provided for all pupils, whatever their ability. Teachers use what they know about what pupils can do to plan for their next steps in learning. For example, pupils in key stage 2 were given the opportunity to review and share what they know about the solar system, which then enabled the teacher to quickly identify where the learning needs to go next.

Teachers use questioning effectively to specifically challenge individual pupils' thinking and deepen their learning. The teaching skilfully caters for the wide range of abilities within the two classes. High expectations, coupled with positive relationships between staff and pupils, help pupils to develop into confident and independent learners. As a result, all pupils, including the most able, are making good progress across the curriculum.

It was also noted at the last inspection that staff had not had the opportunity to visit other schools to observe wider practice so they can further develop their skills. This has now been addressed through joining the Blue Hills federation. The three schools in the federation joined together in September 2017 under one governing body. A shared approach to teaching and learning is being developed, with teachers working across all three schools. Further activities, such as moderating pupils' work, are also enabling best practice to be shared. However, while the federation is providing many benefits to the school, especially in supporting the leadership capacity, it is still in the early days of development. Consequently, the full impact of the work is yet to be seen.

The recently formed governing body has a wide range of skills and expertise. Governors are very knowledgeable about the school's strengths and areas for development. They have taken a proactive approach to the development of the federation and have galvanised the strong working relationships between the three schools. This is enabling the provision in Newcastle CofE Primary to further improve. Governors say that all staff across the federation are 'key employees' and that everyone is 'working together'. This is clearly evident. Governors are managing the school's resources well and are committed to ensuring that they continue to be used to the greatest effect. However, they also recognise that managing the school's resources effectively is a continuing challenge.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders take all possible steps to keep pupils safe. Staff understand the school's policies and procedures and training is updated regularly. All concerns are noted in a 'daily diary', and leaders respond quickly if additional support is needed to keep pupils safe.

Careful checks are made on all staff who work in the school to ensure that they pose no risks to pupils. Visitors are carefully supervised. Risk assessments identify potential risks and the actions needed to minimise the risks to pupils.

Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They are given many opportunities to learn about how to be safe in a range of situations such as crossing the road and when they are using computers. All pupils who responded to the online questionnaire say they feel safe in school and that there is someone to talk to if they have any concerns.

Inspection findings

- You have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Where any weaknesses are identified, you respond quickly and effectively to address them. Your high expectations and uncompromising drive to ensure the best possible outcomes for all pupils mean that the school has continued to improve under your leadership. The leadership of the school is now further supported by the federation, and is continuing to develop.
- Pupils have a wide range of opportunities to develop their writing skills, including opportunities to write in different styles and in different subjects. For example, key stage 2 pupils wrote a newspaper report about the discovery of Skara Brae in 1850 in history, and wrote up detailed experiments about testing the permeability of rocks in science. In key stage 1, pupils wrote about celebrating Christmas in different countries. Teachers' expectations of writing, including presentation, are consistently high in all subjects.
- Teachers place a high focus on developing grammar and punctuation skills. Pupils apply these skills well in their writing. Teachers address misconceptions consistently to ensure that basic mistakes are not repeated. As a result of the good quality of teaching in writing, pupils of all abilities are making at least good progress, with some making rapid progress.
- You place a high priority on providing pupils with a rich and well-balanced education. Pupils are given many opportunities to develop their learning across a wide range of subjects. High-quality work is evident in subjects such as religious education, history, geography and science. Pupils are also given many musical opportunities, with all participating in the Christmas production. All achievements are celebrated.
- The curriculum is well supplemented by a range of extra-curricular opportunities and trips. Visits to the Shrewsbury Museum and events such as the 'dinosaur day' help to bring learning alive. Pupils can take part in clubs such as cookery, drama, sports and the 'book-IT' club. Pupils have rich and varied learning experiences that help to prepare them exceptionally well for the next stage of their education.
- You track pupils' attendance carefully. Any concerns about attendance are followed up quickly, using the support of the education welfare officer. You work hard to ensure that parents understand the importance of attending school regularly. Consequently, attendance has improved and is now in line with the national average.

- You and your staff are very proactive in supporting learning when pupils are unable to attend school. For example, you use computer systems to send work home when the school is closed on 'snow days'. Your drive and determination to give every pupil in the school the best possible education is a great example to us all.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the good quality of education is maintained through the effective use of resources
- the recently formed federation enhances the leadership capacity to drive further improvements across the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Ann Pritchard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. I talked to pupils about their learning and looked at examples of their work. I observed pupils' behaviour before school and at lunchtime. I spoke to parents before school and to pupils throughout the day. I reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's own evaluation of its performance, the school development plan, documents relating to keeping pupils safe, attendance information and the most recent information about pupils' achievement. I considered the 15 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, the seven responses to the staff questionnaire and the 13 responses to the pupil questionnaire.