

6 February 2018

Mrs K McMullan
Headteacher
Stanwix School
Church Street
Stanwix
Carlisle
Cumbria
CA3 9DW

Dear Mrs McMullan

Short inspection of Stanwix School

Following my visit to the school on 16 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained a good quality of education in the school.

You lead with commitment and integrity, working hard to ensure that the quality of education provided is of a consistently high standard. You have dealt effectively with changes to the structure of your senior leadership team and are supported by staff who are highly dedicated. They share your vision and reflect the school's mission statement to 'value the individual, inspire, enjoy and excel'.

Governors know the school well. This is because they work closely with leaders at all levels. They attend training regularly and take an overview of the leadership of subjects across the curriculum. This enables them to ask challenging questions, ensuring that the school continues to improve.

The pupils I spoke to were extremely polite, thoughtful and well behaved. They hold their school in very high regard. They are particularly proud of the school's academic record and relish the challenge offered to them in lessons. Typically, pupils said that the school 'gives us the confidence to push ourselves'. Pupils also speak with pride about their awards cabinet, which houses a broad range of trophies and shields evidencing sporting achievement within and beyond their school. The majority of parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, were pleased with the provision for their children.

Since converting to become an academy, you have worked extremely hard to

ensure that the quality of education provided to the pupils is of a high standard. Your curriculum is broad and balanced and offers pupils the opportunity to achieve in many areas. As a consequence, standards are high. By the time pupils leave your school at the end of key stage 2, performance at both expected and higher levels is well above that seen nationally in reading, writing, mathematics and science.

We discussed areas where further work is required to support school improvement. You are aware that middle-ability pupils are not making strong progress at the higher levels in writing at key stage 1 and in mathematics at key stages 1 and 2. Additionally, you are aware that your school's own evaluation requires further development to enable leaders at all levels to accurately identify the school's many strengths and the areas that require further development. Finally, leaders are undertaking effective work to develop the school's systems for tracking pupils' progress. However, we agreed that this needs to be enhanced to enable staff to track all subjects within the curriculum.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team ensures that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that policies and procedures are understood and followed by staff. Your site is secure and you check visitors on entry. Staff ensure that visitors are provided with appropriate information regarding your school's safeguarding procedures.

Leaders, including governors, receive a broad range of training to ensure that they understand their role in keeping pupils safe. Parents are grateful for the level of care that leaders and staff provide to their children.

I spoke with pupils during the inspection; they were very clear in their understanding of how to stay safe, including online. They showed a clear understanding of what is meant by bullying and noted that there are very few instances of it at Stanwix School. They were confident in their teachers' ability to successfully deal with any rare occasions of poor behaviour.

Inspection findings

- At the start of this inspection, I shared key lines of enquiry with you. The first considered the effectiveness of leaders' efforts to reduce levels of absence for disadvantaged pupils, boys and those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You work closely with your administrative team to track the attendance of all groups of pupils. Additionally, leaders and teachers work in partnership with parents to identify the reasons for absence and to support ways in which pupils can attend more regularly. Your efforts have been successful. Attendance for these groups of pupils has improved considerably and rates of persistent absence have declined.
- The next area we looked at concerned the development of leaders' ability to track the progress and attainment of pupils. Leaders are aware that the school's earlier system to track the progress of pupils was very time-consuming and did not allow teachers or leaders to accurately analyse the progress of all groups. As a

consequence, leaders have worked very hard to create a new system which is specific to your school. Much progress has been made in this area and staff speak in a very positive manner about the new tracking system. However, we agreed that further time is needed to ensure that all members of staff are confident using this system. We also agreed that further development is required to ensure the effective tracking of pupils' progress across all subjects in the curriculum.

- You are also aware that a lower than average number of middle-ability pupils in both key stage 1 and key stage 2 are achieving at the higher levels in mathematics. You are working effectively with your partnership schools and your own leaders to address this issue. As a consequence, you have altered the way in which mathematics is taught in school. Your new assessment system allows you to focus closely on the progress that this group of pupils is making and you are offering targeted support where required. More challenging work is being set and pupils are provided with a broad range of opportunities to undertake activities where they can apply their learning in mathematics. You also provide pupils with a range of resources to help them learn. During the inspection, pupils in Year 2 noted how helpful these resources were. Leaders and teachers ensure that teaching assistants are used in a highly effective manner to offer support to the pupils who need it most. As a consequence, pupils are developing in confidence and understanding. The work that they undertake in their books shows evidence of good progress over time. However, we agreed that further work is required to ensure that a larger proportion of the middle-ability pupils reach the higher levels in mathematics by the end of both key stage 1 and key stage 2.
- My final line of enquiry examined the performance of middle-ability writers. This is because these pupils are performing below the level seen nationally at the higher levels in key stage 2. Leaders at all levels are aware of this issue and are working hard to address it. They are successfully identifying the barriers to the learning of these pupils. Leaders and teachers are aware that the teaching of writing has, in the past, been too structured. As a result, there have been too few opportunities for pupils to be creative with their writing. This is being addressed successfully and pupils are now able to write much more effectively using taught skills to develop their work. You provide themed writing weeks which link to the interests of the pupils such as a 'super hero week'. Teachers ensure that high-quality examples of pupils' writing are displayed around school and celebrated. You have also created large 'class books' which also celebrate a broad range of excellent writing from pupils. An analysis of pupils' work shows that progress is being made in this area. However, further work is required to ensure that a greater number of middle-ability writers in key stage 2 reach the higher levels in future.
- You offer your pupils many opportunities to excel both within and beyond your school site. You are a 'fair trade school' and encourage pupils to undertake a broad range of activities, including network meetings and fundraising where fair trade goods are sold. Teachers enabled Year 5 pupils to take part in a regional music and drama festival where they gained a certificate of merit for 'an excellent performance technically and artistically'. Your curriculum is specifically designed to provide activities which stimulate pupils' imagination. Your school is outward-

looking. The excitement and passion for the curriculum, which is at the heart of your mission statement, are shared by your staff. As a consequence, you are currently exploring ways to further develop the design of the curriculum to ensure that pupils' interests and the locality are used together to further enhance learning opportunities.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- middle-ability pupils receive the challenge they need to make stronger progress in writing and mathematics
- school evaluation and attainment tracking are both sharpened so that leaders and governors can more easily check on progress towards improvement.

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

Gill Pritchard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and the deputy headteacher. I also met with seven governors, including the chair of the governing body. I spoke with subject leaders and your school's independent consultant. I had a formal discussion with a group of 20 pupils and met with members of staff.

Accompanied by you and the deputy headteacher, I visited all year groups in the school to observe pupils' learning. I observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and as they moved around the school. I scrutinised examples of pupils' work and reviewed documents, including your record of checks on the suitability of staff and volunteers to work with children, the school's self-evaluation, improvement plan and assessment information. I also took account of the 93 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, 101 responses from the pupil survey and 17 responses from the staff survey. I considered information posted on the school's website.