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Mrs E Sharp
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Sharp

Short inspection of St Bees Village Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 24 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 October 2012.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Since your appointment, you have led with integrity and commitment to create an outward-looking and ambitious culture within the school. You have an accurate and honest view of the school's strengths and priorities for the future. As a result, you have correctly focused your attention on developing the leadership and management structure and enhancing teaching, learning and assessment.

You have created a curriculum which is broad and balanced. It offers pupils opportunities to develop their skills in many areas including through sport. In Year 6 pupils exchange letters and videos with pals in Hong Kong. This enables them to make global connections in their learning.

Parents speak highly of your leadership and are grateful for the work that you have done to enhance the school's provision. Pupils say that they are proud to tell others that they are from St Bees Village School and welcome the opportunities you provide for them. Recently, pupils entered a construction competition with other schools in the locality. The theme of the competition was the importance of core values. The pupils were very pleased to win an award for 'working and collaborating with others'. Typically, pupils commented, 'Our school strives for collaboration and cooperation so that we can accomplish more together.'

Following the last inspection, leaders were asked to raise the standard of teaching to further improve pupils' progress. You offer teachers a wide range of professional development. You also ensure that they have the opportunities to develop their skills and understanding of the curriculum across different year groups. A new assessment system has been introduced. This enables leaders and teachers to have a clear view of the progress of all groups of pupils in English and mathematics. As a consequence, the school's most recent performance information shows that the percentage of pupils who achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics combined at the end of key stage 2 was in line with that seen nationally. However, you are aware that there are still large fluctuations in the progress and attainment of pupils, including the most able, in key stage 2 over the last three years.

The previous inspectors also asked leaders to extend the opportunities for staff to share and build on good practice, particularly across key stages 1 and 2. You are successfully building strong links with other schools in your local area and receive positive support from the local authority. This has enabled staff at many levels to learn from the good practice of others. You also ensure that staff within school are able to work with colleagues to develop their skills further. As a consequence, your monitoring indicates that teachers' skills have developed and your provision is improving. Additionally, teachers from other schools are now visiting your school to learn from the good practice evident in the early years classes.

During the inspection, we considered areas where further work is required to support your school improvement. You are aware that the most able pupils are not consistently making the progress that they should at the higher levels in English and mathematics at key stage 2. Additionally, your own self-evaluation accurately highlights that the role of the middle leader requires further development. This is to ensure that teachers are given the range of support they require to further develop teaching, learning and assessment. Finally, we discussed the need for governors to work more closely with other leaders in evaluating the school's strengths and areas for development.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team ensures that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You work tirelessly to ensure that the school site is safe and secure for your pupils. Staff are thorough in checking visitors' identity on entry. Visitors are provided with identity badges which include safeguarding information on the back. You have developed clear systems that staff and pupils understand are to be followed in the event of an emergency, and pupils say that this is one of the reasons that they feel so safe in school.

Leaders, including governors, receive regular and detailed training to ensure that they have a thorough and up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding procedures. As a result, staff have a clear understanding of the role they play in keeping children safe.

Inspection findings

- At the start of this inspection, I shared with you a number of lines of enquiry. The first of these considered the effectiveness of actions taken by leaders to improve pupils' phonic skills. Leaders are aware that there were inconsistencies in the approach to teaching phonics across early years and key stage 1. This issue has been addressed in a most successful manner. All staff now follow the same structured system for teaching phonics. This is done in a lively and exciting way that interests and enthuses the pupils. Parents are provided with opportunities both online and through books brought home, to support their children's learning. Teachers also ensure that pupils are provided with additional 'catch-up' sessions when further help is required. As a consequence, the school's results in the phonic screening check have improved and are now broadly in line with the levels seen nationally.
- We also discussed the performance of pupils in mathematics at key stage 2. This is because achievement has been inconsistent over the past three years. The school's most recent performance information at the end of key stage 2 shows that the progress and attainment of pupils in this subject are below those seen nationally. However, during the previous year, attainment was well above average. Your school's own evaluation highlights this issue and you are working hard to ensure that a consistent approach to the teaching of this subject is achieved.
- Your mathematics leader has begun to work with leaders from other schools. This enables her to learn from others and to be able to share good practice. As a consequence, a new system for teaching mathematics has been introduced into school. This enables pupils to develop their reasoning about mathematics. It also provides regular opportunities for problem solving, which pupils are undertaking with increasing levels of confidence. However, further work is still required to increase pupils' performance in this area. Leaders are aware that the approach to the teaching of mathematics across the school needs to be fully embedded and consistent.
- The next area examined was the performance of the most able pupils in school. The school's most recent published performance information shows that the proportion of most-able pupils who reached the higher levels in reading and mathematics at key stage 2 was lower than that seen nationally. Since your appointment in 2015, you have worked hard to address this issue. You have appointed a governor and an additional member of staff to overview the progress of this group of pupils. Your new assessment and tracking system allows leaders and teachers to track all groups, including the most able. As a consequence, more challenging targets are being set for pupils. Nevertheless, observations in lessons during the inspection highlight that, while the most able pupils could confidently explain their learning in detail, there was a lack of challenge for this group in some classes. We have agreed that this will remain an area that leaders and teachers continue to focus on as part of school improvement.
- You are working in a systematic and effective manner to develop your leadership structure and, as a consequence, have the support of a strong senior leadership team. You have correctly identified that the next step in this process is to develop

further the role of the middle leader. This is to ensure that teachers receive increased support with subject development across the curriculum.

- You have built a strong partnership with your governing body and, as a result, governors are taking an increasingly strategic role in the leadership of the school. We agreed that, as this role has developed, governors are now ready to increase their level of involvement in the process of school evaluation. This will enable them to develop further their awareness of the school's strengths and areas for improvement.
- My final line of enquiry concerned the progress of pupils in writing. This is because there have been inconsistencies in achievement in the last two years. You are working effectively with other schools and with your senior leadership team to ensure a more consistent approach to the teaching of all aspects of writing. You have enabled teachers to gain experience in other year groups and you highlight the success of this move in further developing teachers' practice and awareness of the new national curriculum. As a consequence, your most recent published performance information for pupils at the end of key stage 2 shows that results were well above those seen nationally for writing. However, results in the grammar, punctuation and spelling test remained stubbornly below the national average. We agreed that further work is required to ensure increased consistency in achievement in this subject in the future.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- school evaluation is shared so that leaders and governors have a clear view of school improvement in all areas and can demonstrate and measure the impact of their actions
- teachers challenge all pupils, including the most able, more effectively with work that ensures that pupils' progress accelerates in writing and mathematics
- the role of the middle leader is further developed across the curriculum to provide additional support for teachers in ensuring that pupils' progress is rapid and consistent over time.

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 three governors, including the chair of the governing body and the former chair of the governing body. I spoke with key stage leaders and your school's local authority general adviser. I had a formal discussion with a group of 10 pupils and met with your business manager.

Accompanied by you, 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 and improvement plan, and assessment information. I also took account of the 46 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, 47 responses to the pupil survey and 23 responses to the staff survey. I looked at the information posted on the school's website.