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Miss Susan Lock
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Dear Miss Lock

Short inspection of Coniston Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 March 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 2015.

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.**

In the short time you have been headteacher of the school, you have quickly gained an accurate and realistic understanding of its strengths and the areas which require further development. You are ably supported by a dedicated, committed and talented leadership team whose members share your passion and drive for improvement. During the inspection, leaders and staff demonstrated that they have a secure understanding of the needs of pupils in your school. You tailor provision carefully – both academic and pastoral – to support pupils and their families. This is leading to improvements across the school.

During our visits to classrooms, the work that has been done on developing pupils' resilience was clear to see. The 'Coniston Learning Behaviours' are embedded in the school and pupils were able to tell me how these are helping them to learn.

Leaders' self-evaluation of the school's current position is accurate and honest. Detailed analysis of pupils' past performance has enabled leaders to identify priorities for further improvement. These have been communicated widely and there is a shared ownership among leaders, staff and governors. However, plans to address these priorities lack rigour and precision because success criteria are not closely linked to pupils' achievement. This makes it difficult for leaders and governors to

effectively evaluate the impact of planned actions.

One of the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection was to raise attainment in reading and writing by providing pupils with opportunities to articulate their thoughts and explain their ideas more precisely. Observations of learning, discussions with pupils, scrutiny of pupils' work and assessment information all combine to demonstrate that this has been addressed successfully. Pupils feel comfortable in expressing their ideas and working collaboratively in classrooms where staff promote talk and discussion.

Teachers' high expectations for the quality of pupils' spoken language have a positive impact on pupils' writing. As a result, pupils have a good grasp of technical vocabulary, write coherently and manipulate sentence structure appropriately across a range of genres and for different purposes. However, you recognise that inaccuracies in pupils' spelling are, too frequently, lessening the quality of their writing. You have plans to raise teachers' expectations so that pupils consistently use their knowledge of phonics and spelling patterns in their written work.

Leaders have instilled in pupils a love of reading. Teachers' raised expectations and a focus on high-quality texts have ensured that pupils develop their inference skills. Pupils that I spoke with during the inspection talked positively about reading. They praised initiatives, like the reading bus, that leaders have put in place to support and encourage them.

The second area identified at the previous inspection was to develop the effectiveness of leaders' communication with parents and carers. You have put in place a number of initiatives to develop links with parents. These keep parents informed about school events as well as assisting them in supporting their children's learning. Parents I spoke with during the inspection and those who completed the online survey, Parent View, talked positively about the school's work in this area. One parent, summing up the views of many, wrote: 'If ever I have had to discuss anything with anybody from the school, they have responded appropriately and with great speed and care. As the pupils are treated so are their parents.'

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils told me they feel safe in school and would be comfortable talking to any member of staff should they have concerns or feel unhappy in any way. This is testament to the caring ethos that permeates the school at all levels. There is a shared understanding that keeping children safe is everyone's responsibility. Staff are vigilant and watchful for the signs of abuse that children may exhibit while in their care.

Checks on staff before they are appointed are thorough to ensure that everyone in the school is suitable to work with children. This is also the case for volunteers and staff from external agencies. Staff spoken with during the inspection had a secure understanding of the school's policy and procedures. They were clear about what they should do if they have any concerns about a child's well-being. They were also

knowledgeable about the 'Prevent' duty as well as issues around female genital mutilation. The school has a programme of training to ensure that staff maintain an up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding. However, records of this training lack the required level of detail. As a result, leaders do not have a secure picture of individual training needs and the timescales for training to be refreshed.

During our discussions, you and your deputy headteacher articulated clearly the high priority placed on securing pupils' well-being and readiness to learn. Records show that you intervene swiftly with bespoke support when pupils or their families are troubled or at risk. You engage effectively with outside agencies and are tenacious in following up concerns when the level of service falls below that which you expect. You involve parents fully and work collaboratively and sensitively when there are any concerns around the safety or welfare of vulnerable pupils.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed the main areas of focus for the inspection. Firstly, I considered the impact of leaders' actions in raising attainment in mathematics. This was because the school's published assessment information had shown that at the end of Year 6 attainment had been in the bottom 20% nationally for the past two years. This was particularly the case for middle prior-attaining pupils. Similarly, in 2017, pupils at the end of Year 2 performed less well than other pupils nationally.
- Senior leaders have appointed a highly skilled mathematics leader who has a clear understanding of the school's current position and is able to articulate his vision for the school's continued development. Detailed analysis of pupils' attainment has enabled him to identify the reasons for underperformance and he has put plans in place to address these. From the beginning of this academic year, the school has focused on calculation skills and developing pupils' mathematical fluency. Pupils' books show that a recently implemented calculation policy is becoming embedded across the school and is beginning to make a difference.
- Since the beginning of the spring term, the mathematics leader has been developing the staff's understanding of reasoning and the importance of ensuring that pupils of all abilities have the opportunity to apply their mathematical understanding. Again, pupils' books show that improvements are being made but that more time is required to see the full impact of this work.
- The second line of enquiry explored how effectively leaders, including governors, target additional funding to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. The school's published assessment information for 2017 shows that disadvantaged pupils performed less well than their peers both in the school and nationally. This was particularly the case in mathematics.
- My discussions with your deputy headteacher highlighted that she has a secure understanding of pupil premium spending and how this is matched to individual need. Detailed mapping of the provision tracks the interventions which support pupils and its effect on what pupils know, understand and can do. Consequently, in a number of cases, pupils are catching up with their peers. However, leaders' strategic oversight of pupil premium spending lacks sufficient precision. As a

result, weaknesses in the evaluation of the impact of initiatives mean that future plans for improvement lack clarity.

- The next key line of enquiry checked the impact of leaders' actions to raise the attendance of all pupils and, in particular, those eligible for additional funding. The school's attendance data shows that, although attendance is still below the national average, it is showing significant improvement. Similarly, the difference between the attendance of vulnerable pupils and that of all pupils is diminishing. In our discussions, you recognised that your work in this area needs to continue, especially with those pupils who may only be in your school for a short period of time.
- Finally, I examined governors' understanding of their statutory duties and how they are holding leaders to account to improve pupils' achievement. This was because the information that has been published on the school's website does not meet statutory requirements. For example, there is no information regarding pupils' outcomes for 2016 or 2017, or how the sport premium is being spent to develop pupils' outcomes in physical education.
- Through my discussions with governors it became clear that they possess a wide range of skills and, through their individual links to aspects of the school's work, gather a variety of first-hand information. For example, they participate in learning walks and attend meetings where pupils' progress is discussed. They compare the information they receive from school leaders with their own knowledge of the school as well as with reports they receive from external agencies, including the local authority. However, our discussions highlighted that gaps in governors' understanding about their statutory duties result in some areas of their responsibility not being sufficiently addressed. For example, the information about pupil premium spending which you have published on the school's website lacks detail and does not meet statutory requirements. Consequently, governors are unable to fully explain the difference that this funding is making to the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- attainment in key stage 1 and key stage 2 continues to rise by:
 - further developing pupils' mathematical understanding and reasoning skills
 - raising teachers' expectations so that pupils consistently use their knowledge of phonics and spelling patterns in their independent written work
- improvement plans focus on priorities identified through self-evaluation and are monitored against precise actions and success criteria linked closely to pupils' achievement
- attendance continues to rise for all pupils, particularly the most vulnerable
- they monitor the difference that additional funding is making for disadvantaged pupils

- that all statutory requirements for what schools must publish online are met.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Dyer
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and other members of your senior leadership team. We discussed the school's self-evaluation, information about pupils' progress and improvements made since the previous inspection. Together, with the deputy headteacher, we observed pupils in classrooms and spoke with them about their learning. I analysed work in pupils' books from across the curriculum.

I had meetings with senior leaders and three governors, including the chair of governors. I also met with a representative from the local authority. I looked at a range of written evidence, including documents relating to safeguarding and attendance. I spoke with parents at the end of the school day. I took account of the views expressed by 20 parents who completed the online survey, Parent View, as well as their written comments. I also considered the views of staff and pupils who returned their questionnaires.