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Mrs Alison Goodwin
Applegarth Primary School
Upwell Road
Northallerton
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Dear Mrs Goodwin

Short inspection of Applegarth Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 14 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 June 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. There have been some new appointments of subject leaders as well as governors since the school's last inspection. Nearly all the parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive. They spoke about how their children had thrived in a 'vibrant, exciting and happy' school with a 'family feel', filled with opportunities and experiences for their children.

You have successfully established a culture for improvement within the school. Pupils have good attitudes to learning. In lessons, they are keen to offer their suggestions, confident enough to clarify their own misconceptions in front of their peers and are motivated to challenge themselves. This culture of self-improvement is also evident from your own research as well as that of your staff. They are fully committed to their own professional development and participate in a range of projects and collaborative partnerships. This is helping to raise pupils' achievement and is already having a positive impact on improving the teaching of mathematics and starting to have an impact on pupils' achievement in reading.

The proportion of children who leave the early years foundation stage with a good level of development and achievement in reading, writing and mathematics is at least equivalent to the national average. Parents are complimentary about the good provision at this stage of their children's education and refer to the good start they get.

Pupils' achievement in writing has improved since the school's last inspection. By

the time pupils reach the end of key stage 2, pupils have made good progress in writing. This is also reflected in their attainment, which is similar to the national average, including those pupils writing at a higher standard.

The teaching of phonics has been improved. Younger pupils gain a solid foundation in learning their letter sounds so they acquire early reading skills. This is further secured at the end of key stage 1, where pupils' achievement in reading is in line with the national average for the expected standard as well as at greater depth. This good start has not been consistently reflected in achievement at the end of key stage 2. The school is now tackling this with new approaches to the teaching of reading in key stage 2, and this is starting to have an impact on improving pupils' enjoyment of reading.

Achievement in mathematics, at the end of both key stages, has remained static over time. However, the school's new teaching method, recently introduced, shows that some pupils are making rapid improvement. This is particularly so for the younger pupils and the most able pupils in key stage 2.

Safeguarding is effective.

Responses to the staff and parent questionnaires show confidence that the school provides a safe environment for the pupils. Pupils I spoke to concur with this view. They understand how to stay safe in different situations including on the internet. They have a good understanding of what constitutes bullying and the procedures for dealing with it. They are confident that teachers use discipline fairly.

Leaders have created a safe culture to take care of the school's pupils and ensure that procedures are implemented to protect them. Staff and governors understand their obligations for safeguarding and take appropriate action when necessary. They liaise with outside agencies, and this provides pupils and families with the support they need. Procedures and policies are fit for purpose. All members of staff are checked for their suitability to work with children. There was an omission in the record of the checks made on the verification of staff at the start of the inspection. This was rectified within the day.

The school is highly vigilant in ensuring that pupils attend school regularly. There are robust systems in place to follow up absences on the first day. Where necessary, staff involve external agencies to ensure that pupils are safe when not in school.

Inspection findings

- Following the school's previous inspection, the school was tasked with improving the quality of teaching to raise standards, particularly in mathematics. The school has taken a robust approach to improving the teaching of this subject. The new teaching method, recently introduced, shows some rapid improvement in mathematics achievement. This is particularly the case for the younger pupils

who quickly move from using concrete apparatus to finding their own solutions.

- Mathematics books of the older pupils, and in particular the most able, show that they are able to explain their mathematical reasoning in considerable depth. This skill is also reflected in comments from parents, who say that their children are developing good critical-thinking skills.
- Pupils' mathematics work in their books is set out clearly, helping them when writing down their calculations. Pupils' 'workings out', sometimes in the form of pictorial representation for the younger pupils, is also recorded neatly, providing a clear picture of how they have concluded their answer.
- Achievement in reading at the end of key stage 2 improved last year to be in line with the national average. The school has reviewed its provision and support to promote reading. Newly purchased books have inspired pupils to read a range of literature, including the classics such as Robert Louis Stevenson's 'Treasure Island'. Pupils talk enthusiastically about their enjoyment of reading both at school and at home, but are not always confident in discussing similarities and differences between authors.
- The teaching of reading is not consistent throughout the school. While pupils show well-developed skills to sustain concentration during 'silent reading', time is not always well spent in lessons. Teachers do not always take the opportunity to teach skills to improve pupils' understanding of unfamiliar words or explain how authors use language. Independent activities, planned for pupils, do not always help them to infer meaning from a text and develop as confident and proficient readers by the end of key stage 2.
- Performance management is used to improve the quality of teaching. Leaders' lesson observations provide detailed and comprehensive feedback to teachers, including the impact of their teaching on pupils' achievement and progress.
- Leaders have a secure understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have accurately identified areas for improvement. The school's improvement plan sets out the principles of raising achievement, but lacks clarity in setting out clearly the end of year expectations. This vagueness is reflected in subject leader action plans, which lack milestones or quantifiable targets by which to measure the impact of their work against improvement in pupils' achievement.
- Newly appointed subject leaders and governors are getting to grips with their strategic role. They are about to receive training to help them step back and review the impact of initiatives and expenditure on raising pupils' achievement. Governors are actively involved in the school and do challenge leaders about pupils' performance. However, they do not use the school's plans for improvement sufficiently well to hold leaders to account.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- develop the roles of new leaders and governors so that they can devise improvement plans clearly linked to pupils' achievement and effectively review

the impact of their initiatives

- improve the teaching of reading in key stage 2 so that pupils acquire a wider vocabulary, can draw inference from evidence in a text, understand how authors use language and can compare and contrast different authors.

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

Yours sincerely

Karen Heath
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher and subject leaders for mathematics and English to discuss aspects of the school's work. You shared your own evaluation of the effectiveness of the school and your improvement plans. With your deputy headteacher, we observed several lessons in reading and mathematics. Together with your subject leaders I looked at pupils' mathematics books.

I reviewed a range of documents, including those relating to the safety and welfare of children. I spoke to pupils about behaviour, safety and their enjoyment of school as well as considering the views of 29 pupil responses to the online survey. I heard pupils in Years 5 and 6 read, and discussed their enjoyment and experience of reading. I observed the provision in the school's breakfast club. The 105 responses from parents to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey for parents, as well as their written comments, were taken into consideration.

I met with the chair of governors and three other members of the governing body, and a representative of the local authority. I considered the views of the 25 staff who responded to the staff survey.