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Ms Tessa Fenoughty
Headteacher
Butterknowle Primary School
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Dear Ms Fenoughty

Short inspection of Butterknowle Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 1 May 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 September 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment as headteacher in September 2014, you have provided ambitious, dedicated and sharply focused leadership to drive school improvement. As a result, the school's learning environment has developed substantially. This has improved pupils' learning in lessons and enriched their opportunities to engage in adventurous play at breaktimes and lunchtimes. Along with governors, you have restructured staffing to ensure that it meets pupils' needs well. At the same time, you have made effective use of available financial resources. Along with the deputy headteacher and governors, you have accurately identified the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. Your school improvement plan clearly identifies leaders' plans for the school's development. You, your staff and governors have created an inclusive school where pupils thrive, and they make at least good progress academically.

Leaders, staff and governors have worked successfully to address the areas in need of improvement identified at the previous inspection. Since that time, there have been several changes to the school's staffing and leadership. You have developed a range of interesting approaches to teaching your curriculum. This often involves learning in the outdoors in your school grounds and visits to enrich pupils' learning. In 2017, there were clear improvements to pupils' progress by the end of Year 6 in mathematics and particularly in reading, although you agree that there is more to do to improve pupils' progress in writing across the school.

Your focus on improving the teaching of phonics has ensured a consistent approach to developing pupils' phonics knowledge. This work begins in early years and progresses well through your key stage 1. The small numbers in each year group mean that it is not possible to determine a trend in your school's phonics results. However, your detailed analysis of pupils' phonics results on the Year 1 phonics screening check shows that pupils make good progress. Where pupils have not fully achieved the necessary standards, you ensure that they continue to receive well-matched support to develop their skills. You and your subject leader for English have now focused your attention to improving the spelling skills of older pupils, including addressing any gaps in their phonics knowledge. This recently introduced approach is not fully embedded, and the improvements in spelling are not reflected in pupils' independent work.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong safeguarding culture at your school. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. They carry out appropriate checks for all staff, governors and volunteers. Staff and governors receive regular and appropriate training so they know how to keep pupils safe. This includes training about how to protect pupils from radicalisation and extremism. Consequently, staff and governors understand the safeguarding procedures and their own responsibilities. You and your staff work effectively with parents and carers and with other agencies. You have developed the school entrances, and this has improved site security. Use of role-play helps your pupils understand what actions to take in an emergency. You have completed appropriate risk assessment for the adventurous activities available in your playground areas. You agree that it is important that staff and pupils are clear about the expectations when accessing these resources.

Your pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including when they are online. Pupils know the different forms that bullying can take and they said that this is rare in your school. The vast majority of pupils who responded to the pupil questionnaire believe that staff will help them if something is worrying them. Your detailed records confirm this and demonstrate that staff follow up the limited number of behaviour or bullying incidents promptly and thoroughly. Pupils told me that one of the best things about the school is that everyone is friendly, and they enjoy the different learning opportunities, including going out of school on visits. During the inspection, pupils' behaviour was very good in lessons and at playtime.

Inspection findings

- In 2017, pupils' progress in writing by the end of Year 6 was similar to that found nationally. Nevertheless, leaders have rightly identified the need to improve pupils' progress in writing further to bring it more in line with that achieved for reading. You have put in place a number of relevant actions to address this. The use of good-quality texts is inspiring pupils to use vocabulary that is more imaginative and providing models to improve the style of their writing. This is beginning to improve the quality of pupils' work. The involvement in a writing

initiative with a network of schools similar in size to yours is drawing on national research and providing opportunities to share effective practice with other schools. Much of this work is moving in a positive direction, but is at too early a stage of implementation to determine its effect.

- You recognise that pupils' attainment in grammar, punctuation and spelling lags behind national averages. You have introduced a more structured approach to the development of spelling. Pupils have regular lessons to develop their spelling and address some of their gaps in phonics knowledge. However, in some of the books we reviewed, this has not yet brought improvements when pupils are writing independently.
- Your records generally keep careful track of individual pupils' progress including when pupils are receiving additional support to catch up. This helps you and your staff identify where pupils are on track to meet your ambitious targets or where some additional support may be required. Meetings with other schools are beginning to help you make secure assessments of pupils' attainment in writing. However, when we reviewed your individual records for pupils' progress in writing, staff approaches to completing these were variable.
- There have been recent changes to the leadership of English and mathematics. These new leaders have accurately identified the key priorities for development in their areas of responsibility. They are taking action to drive improvement and beginning to check for improvement. For example, the mathematics subject leader has taken action to strengthen pupils' number knowledge and to use this more regularly in problem-solving and reasoning activities. Similarly, the English subject leader has taken action to strengthen the teaching of writing. You recognise that these leaders are still relatively inexperienced in their roles and you need to maintain their development and support to help them increase further their leadership skills.
- Since your appointment as headteacher, there have been substantial improvements in early years. You have made effective use of your own expertise to ensure that this phase of the school has developed well. The outdoor learning environment now provides children with an extensive range of learning opportunities. The recent increase in school staff has enabled the children in early years to be taught in a separate class; this is enabling the curriculum to be tailored more precisely to their needs. When children start your early years provision, they come with a range of development that is variable year on year. Your detailed records of children's progress demonstrate that they make at least good progress from their starting points.
- Governors have a good understanding of the community the school serves and the school's priorities. The school improvement plan clearly identifies where governors link to the school's priorities for improvement. Governors' visits to school, for example, to consider safeguarding arrangements, along with information from you, keep them well informed about school developments. This helps governors to check that their strategic decisions are having the intended effect.
- You carefully analyse your attendance figures and provide support and challenge for pupils and their families where you have concerns about attendance. In 2017,

levels of absence were below those found nationally. Your current attendance figures are very similar. Your pupils understand the importance of good attendance and punctuality.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school's recent plans for improving the teaching of writing and spelling are implemented so that pupils' progress and attainment in these areas improve further
- the developing approaches for assessing and recording pupils' progress in writing are embedded to strengthen further the accuracy of assessment of pupils' progress and attainment in this subject
- middle leaders, new to their roles, continue to receive support and training so they develop further the skills needed to drive improvements and to check the effectiveness of their actions in their areas of responsibility.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Reeves
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I discussed the work of the school with you and leaders for English and mathematics. I observed and spoke with pupils during playtime and at other times during the day. I had a telephone discussion with a representative from the local authority. My discussions with four governors, including the chair of the governing body, provided me with additional information. I took into account school documentation, assessment information, policies and information posted on the school website. I considered the 12 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View. I reviewed the 14 responses to the staff survey and the 20 responses to the pupil survey. Along with you, I visited all classes to observe teaching and learning. I listened to some pupils read during lessons. I looked at pupils' English work to help evaluate the quality of teaching and learning over time. I considered information relating to safeguarding, attendance, behaviour and bullying.