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Mrs L Smith
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Dear Mrs Smith

Short inspection of Blackford C of E Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 23 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 May 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have created an enthusiastic team whose members are passionate about teaching and learning. Staff and governors share your high expectations. Your determination to do the very best for all the pupils in your care lives up to the school's motto of being 'a little school with a big heart'.

You and your staff have worked effectively to tackle the areas of improvement from the previous inspection. The quality of teaching has improved because you have established a culture of professional dialogue, support and challenge among the staff. They appreciate the opportunities to share ideas and expertise with each other, and with colleagues in other schools. This is particularly helpful to your staff who are new to teaching.

You have made changes to the teaching of writing. Staff have received effective training. As a result, teachers now plan opportunities for pupils to apply their knowledge and skills in writing in other curriculum subjects. This was exemplified in history, when pupils wrote articles for the 'Vicious Viking News'. In science, pupils record their experiments and conclusions using technical vocabulary accurately. Teachers give pupils the skills they need to be able to review and edit their work. As a result, pupils understand clearly the next steps in their learning in order to improve the quality and accuracy of their work. They are proud of their achievements and this is reflected in the quality of the work seen during the inspection. Pupils' positive attitudes towards learning contribute to the strong progress that they make. However, pupils' limited vocabulary knowledge sometimes

hinders them from producing work of a higher standard. You have recently made improvements to the way mathematics is taught and we looked at how pupils are learning to solve problems and deal with mathematical challenges. It is too soon to measure the impact of this change in teaching on outcomes for pupils.

The vast majority of parents spoken to during the inspection, and those who accessed Ofsted's online questionnaire, were very positive about the school. Parents are confident that their children are happy and safe in a caring and nurturing environment. Parents feel that they are valued and that their concerns are always listened to. Parents of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities commented positively on the care that their children receive and the good progress that they are making. Parents appreciate the opportunities that their children have to learn to play musical instruments, and the extracurricular activities available. One comment summed up the many positive ones: 'It's a small school, like a family, which is why we chose it for our children.'

Pupils who spoke to me said that they enjoy school and appreciate all the opportunities they have to participate in a wide range of clubs, including gardening, art and choir. They particularly enjoyed the opportunity to sing with pupils from other schools in Carlisle Cathedral. Pupils are polite and well mannered. They talk confidently about their learning, particularly the practical experiments in science. Older pupils take their responsibilities seriously as role models for younger pupils, members of the school council and as the newly formed 'mini police'. Pupils are proud of their school. A pupil said: 'The people are the most special thing about Blackford Primary school.'

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors, ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Stringent arrangements are in place to ensure that the school's most vulnerable pupils are safe when they are absent from school. Leaders work with other agencies very effectively. Safeguarding procedures are understood by staff. Staff and governors receive regular training and are kept up to date on relevant safeguarding issues.

Pupils told me they feel safe at school because everybody knows each other and the teachers look after them. They learn about how to keep themselves safe, particularly when they are online. They understand the different forms that bullying can take, but said that it is rare. They speak confidently about how teachers deal quickly and effectively with any inappropriate behaviour should it occur.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, we looked at several key lines of enquiry. The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is above the national average and I was interested to see if leaders have put effective provision in place for these pupils. Leaders are very knowledgeable about individual pupils' needs. Training for staff ensures that pupils who are struggling are identified quickly. Evidence is

gathered from a range of sources, including observations, pupils' work and talking to parents. Highly skilled staff are able to provide the support and guidance pupils need by working with them in small groups or individually. Leaders work with colleagues, including from other schools, to share expertise. As a result, pupils settle quickly into the local secondary school. Leaders work effectively with other professionals to access training and resources. Positive relationships with families and other agencies ensure that pupils receive the additional help that they need. Consequently, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are making expected, and in some cases accelerated, progress from their starting points.

- We also discussed the changes you have made to the way writing is taught. Training for staff has ensured that writing is taught consistently across the school, particularly in the teaching of spelling and vocabulary. Staff develop resources and plan learning activities which meet the needs of pupils effectively. Teachers share the criteria for successful writing with pupils, particularly in key stage 2. Consequently, pupils know what they need to do to improve their learning. Pupils said that this helps them to improve the quality of their work. Teachers use assessment effectively to identify when pupils are struggling. Skilled staff give them the help that they need to catch up. The majority of pupils have the skills and knowledge typical for their age. Strategies for improving pupils' vocabulary knowledge are beginning to impact positively on the progress pupils make in their writing. However, you agreed that not a high enough proportion of pupils are working at a high standard by the end of key stage 2.
- Next, we looked at the changes you have made recently to the way mathematics is taught. Your analysis of assessment information, and a review of teaching and learning, identified the barriers to pupils' success as mathematicians. Through collaboration with other colleagues, including colleagues from other schools, staff receive training to improve their skills and knowledge. Leaders monitor the implementation of the new calculations policy, ensuring consistency. Staff work together, sharing good practice, ideas and expertise. Staff plan learning opportunities that meet the needs of the pupils accurately. Pupils who spoke to me said that they enjoy being challenged because it pushes their thinking, even if they get it wrong. Work in pupils' books shows that pupils are becoming proficient at applying their mathematical skills and knowledge to solve challenging problems and to explain the rationales for their answers. Workshops for parents explain how mathematics is taught so that they can help their children at home. Assessment information shows that the majority of pupils are making expected and better progress in mathematics. However, it is too soon to measure the impact of these actions on outcomes at the end of key stage 2.
- We also looked at the actions that have been taken by leaders to ensure that children in Reception are ready for Year 1. You know the children and their families extremely well. You have developed successful links with the variety of settings the children attend before starting school. Parents commented that their children settle quickly into the routines of school as a result of the well-thought-through activities and events they attend in the summer term. Leaders ensure that staff have the skills, knowledge and understanding they need to promote the good progress children make. The majority of children start school with

knowledge and skills below those typical for their age. Staff quickly identify the next steps in children's learning. You work closely with colleagues in other schools to share expertise, and to ensure that your assessments are accurate. Workshops in how you teach reading and phonics enable parents to develop the skills that they need to support their children's learning at home. Parents contribute regularly to the evidence that you collect about what their children have learned. Parents speak highly of how well your staff know their children, and how happy the children are to come to school each day. The majority of pupils reach a good level of development by the end of Reception, and are ready for Year 1.

- Finally, we looked at attendance, particularly that of pupils who are persistently absent from school. Attendance for the majority of pupils is in line with the national average. There is a range of rewards and incentives, including certificates and small prizes each term, which contribute to the improving level of attendance. You know your families extremely well. However, the persistent absence of a small proportion of pupils does impact negatively on the overall attendance for the school. Procedures are in place to ensure that pupils who are persistently absent receive the care, guidance and support that they need. The school's assessment information shows that when pupils do attend school regularly, they make good progress from their starting points. However, it is important to ensure that they are given the help that they need to catch up quickly.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they embed the changes made to the way in which staff teach mathematics, so that a higher proportion of pupils reach the expected standard by the end of key stage 2
- they continue to develop pupils' vocabulary knowledge, so that a higher proportion of pupils are working at a higher standard in their writing
- they continue to ensure that the school's most vulnerable pupils are given the support that they need to catch up quickly following absence from school.

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

Yours sincerely

Amanda Stringer
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, other members of the leadership team and staff. I also met with four members of the governing body and with a representative of the local authority. I visited classrooms with you, where I had the opportunity to speak with pupils and look at their work. I met with a group of pupils formally during the day and I spoke with a number of parents at the start of the school day. I took into account two responses to the staff questionnaire and the 19 responses to the pupil questionnaire. I also considered six free-text comments and the eight responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents. I scrutinised pupils' assessment information, the school's self-evaluation document and the school improvement plan. I checked on the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding procedures and practices.