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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mr Matt Shillito
Headteacher
Sicklinghall Community Primary School
Main Street
Sicklinghall
Wetherby
North Yorkshire
LS22 4BD

Dear Mr Shillito

Short inspection of Sicklinghall Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 June 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Sicklinghall Primary School is a school where pupils are safe and feel safe. Behaviour is good. Pupils conduct themselves well at all times of the day, and relationships between different groups of pupils, and between adults and pupils, are very strong. This means that bullying is very rare, as are serious behaviour incidents. As a result, pupils feel safe and parents believe that their children are safe, happy and well cared for in school. Parents also report that you listen to their concerns and deal with these quickly and effectively. They also feel well informed about what is happening at school, and about how well their child is doing. Teaching effectively engages pupils. Pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and are keen to learn and to do well. Classroom work is further supported by visits out and the events you hold in school. For example, pupils go on residential visits from key stage 1, undertaking new challenges and experiencing working as a team. You work well with your own team, which includes governors, who understand and support the school well.

At the last inspection, inspectors identified two main areas for improvement. First, they recommended that work needed to be more challenging for different ability groups. It is clear that pupils currently in the school are challenged well for much of the time. This is the case for different groups of pupils, especially in Reception and Year 1. Adults understand these pupils' needs well and provide varied activities to engage the pupils and to help them make strong progress. However, further up the school, challenge is not consistent. This largely means that some of the most able

pupils are not moved on as soon as they are ready. Sometimes they are left to work at the same level for an extended period of time, which slows their progress.

The second area for improvement that inspectors recommended was that leaders further improve their impact on learning by ensuring that middle leaders are fully involved in improving teaching. You and your leadership team, including middle leaders, have an accurate understanding of teaching and of your current strengths and areas for further development. This means that leaders provide teachers with strong training opportunities to improve classroom practice. You have also been proactive in working with other schools to observe and share best practice, all of which has helped to maintain a good standard of teaching.

Since you arrived at the school, you have worked hard to improve pupils' attendance, which has been low historically. Your work has been effective, so that now attendance is consistently high and very few pupils are persistently absent. You have been very clear with parents about the importance of regular attendance to school. You have also rewarded excellent attendance and the most improved attendance. Most importantly, pupils want to come to school. The curriculum is varied, engaging and relevant to the pupils. Through the topics you cover, as well as the trips and visitors to school, the curriculum also enhances pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, as well as their understanding of British values.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors ensure that the school's safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and pupils are kept safe. They make sure that staff receive regular safeguarding and child protection training and this is updated when necessary. All your staff understand their responsibilities around pupils' safety and they know what to do when an issue around safeguarding arises. Your staff, governors and volunteers are checked for their suitability to work and be with children. These checks meet statutory requirements and you keep detailed records of them. The school also keeps records of any incidents that relate to pupils' safety and safeguarding. This ensures that you and your staff have a clear understanding of any safeguarding issues, and this helps the school to work effectively with external agencies.

The very few incidents of inappropriate behaviour, coupled with the rarity of bullying, confirm that pupils are safe in school.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I was keen to understand what the school is doing to improve standards in phonics. Pupils who do the phonics check in Year 1 now do very well compared to pupils nationally. This represents an improvement since the last inspection. The teaching of phonics in the early years and in Year 1 is strong. Teachers ensure that there is a clear and regular focus on phonics in other areas of learning, so pupils use their phonic skills in their reading and

writing throughout each day, which leads to good progress in these areas.

- I also focused on the provision for disadvantaged pupils, who have previously done less well than their peers in school and nationally. You have also been aware of this issue and have made a concerted effort to ensure that teachers understand these pupils' needs when planning activities. You now have systems in place to enable any underachievement by pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, to be identified quickly. Teachers respond well and, as a result, disadvantaged pupils are now making good progress and their attainment is improving.
- A further area of focus for the inspection was how you are improving outcomes in writing and, in particular, pupils' use of spelling, punctuation and grammar. The improvement in phonics has led to better writing and reading standards in the younger pupils in school. However, pupils in key stage 2 do not write for long enough periods and so they do not gain sufficient stamina to write at length. Equally, they do not practise and improve their spelling, punctuation and grammar skills enough. As a result, progress and attainment in writing is not as good as in reading and mathematics.
- Another area of focus for the inspection was the assessment systems that you have in place. I wanted to understand if these were fit for purpose. You have created a system in school which enables teachers to easily and quickly identify not only the standard of pupils' reading, writing and mathematics, but also the gaps in their learning. In turn, this helps teachers to plan activities to fill those gaps and support their good progress.
- During the inspection, I was keen to understand how well the children in the early years are served. The proportion of children who leave Reception with a good level of development is high. An increasing proportion exceeds this measure. This is partly due to a strong curriculum in the early years, which engages children and which meets their interests well. The assessment of children is accurate and the information this provides is then used well by adults to identify and address any gaps in individual children's learning. Teaching in the early years is strong. In addition, parents report that the school's systems enable them to be highly involved in their children's education. All of this prepares children well for learning in Year 1.
- Mathematics and reading are taught well in school, and there is a systematic approach to enabling pupils to regularly practise their basic skills and to then use and apply these skills in these subjects. Pupils are often given challenging activities to push them, and this helps them to make good progress. However, at times, the level of challenge for the most able is lacking, which means their progress is not always as rapid as other groups' progress.
- Pupils' well-being is a clear priority for the school. For example, pupils do physical education lessons which are taught by specialists. They also have the chance to do after-school sporting activities, which again are led by specialists. This means that a high proportion of pupils take part in sport on a regular basis. The sports premium funding the school has received has also been used to improve the outdoor facilities for the pupils at playtime. These facilities enhance pupils' gross motor skills and mean that they are well engaged and highly active during

playtime.

- Governors make a positive contribution to school life. They know that the school has improved since the last inspection, and are keen to continue these improvements. They are honest and knowledgeable about what the school needs to do to further improve the school. They also understand their role in questioning and challenging leaders so that decisions made are in the best interests of the pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to write at length, so that they can build their stamina for writing and can improve their spelling, punctuation and grammar skills
- teachers provide all pupils, especially the most able in key stage 2, with challenge on a consistent basis, so that more of these pupils can reach the highest standards in reading, writing and mathematics.

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

Fiona McNally
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I visited a number of classes to observe teaching and its impact on learning. I also looked at a wide range of pupils' books from several year groups, across a variety of subjects. I met with you and your governors and with other senior and middle leaders. I also held a discussion with a representative from the local authority. I looked at the school's information about the safeguarding of pupils and examined behaviour, attendance and bullying records. I also checked a range of other documentation, such as your self-evaluation, your school development plan and your assessment information. I held formal discussions with some pupils from key stage 1 and 2 and spoke informally to several pupils during break time. I also listened to four pupils read from Years 2 and 6. I considered the parents' responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I spoke to a number of parents in the playground as they dropped their children off at school.