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Miss Jenny Morgan
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Morgan

Short inspection of Whitley Chapel Church of England First School

Following my visit to the school on 4 July 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 January 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Good quality teaching and learning have been sustained effectively and improved in many areas. You have successfully preserved and enhanced the welcoming family atmosphere of this small school which sits at the heart of the hamlet. One parent accurately described the school as 'the lynchpin of the community'. Through innovative use of social media, events such as fitness challenges, special lunches, fayres and many varied fundraising activities are well attended and highly valued. You have dedicated numerous additional hours in the recent consultation procedures to fight on behalf of the school as it faced the threat of closure. One governor stated to me that it is to your great credit that you and all school staff have remained impeccably professional and committed to your primary role of teaching, nurturing and developing the children. I completely concur. You acknowledge that now is the time to press ahead and embed the many changes you and the staff team have implemented in the last year.

Your significant teaching commitment ensures that you have daily contact with all pupils, as well as teaching most days in the key stage 1 class. As a result, you know the school's strengths and weaknesses inside out. This is reflected in your incisive and honest self-evaluation upon which you have based detailed and sensible actions for further improvement. Planned actions are clearly measurable, time related and subject to rigorous monitoring and evaluation. Termly updates are provided for governors. There is a perceptible commitment and dynamism shown by all staff. A

culture has been established in which teachers and teaching assistants reflect carefully on the effectiveness of planned activities. No one is afraid to hold up their hand if learning has been insufficiently effective. Consequently, challenges are faced together as part of a united and strong team, eager for constant improvement.

You have ensured that the areas for improvement raised in the previous inspection have been addressed successfully. Significant investment in training and support to enhance the professional expertise of staff in the teaching of mathematics resulted in a rise both in pupils' attainment and in the pace of their progress. Since then, the school has moved forward to address issues in the quality of writing, including handwriting, grammar and punctuation. You acknowledge that, to some extent, you have taken your eye off the ball with regard to embedding the changes made in mathematics. Work is still needed to consistently provide suitably challenging work and to develop pupils' skills in reasoning activities.

Pupils are extremely well behaved, polite and courteous. They are extremely proud and appreciative of their school. They value highly its rural setting and spacious and inviting grounds. Lunchtimes are sociable, friendly times when the whole school sits together to eat healthy food cooked on the premises. Pupils freely explore the wooded area at breaktime, but also as part of their innovative extended curriculum. Despite its many strengths, you believe that an upcoming curriculum review will address existing issues around consistency in assessing and tracking pupils' skills in all curricular subjects.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Policies, procedures and records are of good quality and regularly updated by the office manager. You also check these records regularly. Staff and governor training is thorough and up to date, including training to ensure that recruitment procedures are watertight. Pupils are kept safe from the risk of extremism and online dangers. Certificates from staff training are retained as records of attendance. Staff have access to well-written policies and guidance and have a secure understanding of their responsibilities for safeguarding pupils.

Under the watchful eye of all staff at your small, family-oriented school, no stone is left unturned to ensure that all pupils are safe and have opportunities to thrive. You know every family and child well, and are completely aware of even the smallest concern or worry. You have also ensured that the curriculum supports pupils well in maintaining their own safety. Pupils know the dangers of social media and understand they should never post personal details online. Pupils have full trust in their teachers and teaching assistants who look after them and report feeling safe all of the time. They assured me that any minor disputes are immediately and effectively dealt with by all adults.

Inspection findings

- The quality of provision in the early years ensures that children make very good progress in their learning. All children have reached a good level of development this year. They show independence, maturity and inquisitiveness. The indoor and outdoor learning environments are exciting and interesting. Activities capture children's imagination as they work and play happily together. Strong relationships enable purposeful and effective interactions between adults and children. Staff are skilled at supporting children's independent learning in creative play. I was pleased to 'buy a ticket' to watch a puppet show about a bad-tempered ladybird. Reception children's basic skills in mathematics, reading and writing are strong, as seen in the quantity and quality of work in their books. Children are extremely well prepared to begin Year 1.
- You have been resolute in your determination to improve the quality of teaching, which in turn has allowed pupils to be successful learners. Over the past two years, pupils have achieved very well. Pupils continue to make strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics in both key stage 1 and key stage 2. Although pupil numbers are very small, nearly all pupils are reaching standards of attainment expected for their age in each year group.
- From work seen in books and scrutiny of the school's detailed assessment systems, an increasing proportion of pupils are working at a greater depth in their learning. You acknowledge that in mathematics, not all work is consistently pitched well, according to pupils' abilities. Occasionally, it lacks the requisite challenge, especially for the most able pupils. You have been successful in your quest to develop pupils' skills in mathematical problem solving, with many examples seen in books. Further work is required to develop pupils' skills in mathematical reasoning. This will allow them to explain, justify and prove their thinking in mathematical questions.
- You have sensibly developed a shared approach to curriculum development with your two teaching colleagues in school. Ideas are discussed, strengths and weaknesses considered, and new plans put into place. There are significant strengths in areas of the curriculum, which in many parts is innovative, exciting and fun. You have ensured that you make the most of the school's superb environment and grounds to develop pupils' outdoor adventurous experiences and teamwork. Activities are used as the inspiration for writing, and recently proved very effective for a group of key stage 2 pupils. Pupils attempted to replicate an Egyptian 'shaduf' for transporting water, using natural materials from the wood. Pupils wrote lengthy, detailed and accurate accounts of their attempts.
- You have ensured that staff specialisms are reflected in their deployment across school to teach specific subjects. The development of pupils' skills in art has been very successful. The school is covered in high-quality pieces of artwork, such as painted still life pictures of fruit inspired by Paul Cezanne or portraits inspired by Nick Gentry. Sensible use is made of locally based 'experts' to develop pupils' understanding in computing or science work. Science is clearly focused on developing pupils' understanding of scientific enquiry through asking and investigating key questions.

- A curriculum review is under way. Further work is needed to ensure that the curriculum has planned opportunities to allow pupils to further develop their writing skills. The current review will also ensure that teachers assess and track pupils' progress in subject-specific skills in every curricular area. This is already undertaken in some subjects, such as art, science, reading, writing and mathematics.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- systems to accurately assess the progress of pupils are extended to all creative and foundation subjects
- pupils are provided with regular access to reasoning activities in mathematics
- work set in mathematics is appropriately challenging for all pupils, especially the most able pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Philip Scott
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and the other teachers in the school. I held a meeting with two governors, including the chair of the governing body, and met with a representative of the local authority. I visited lessons in each key stage and reviewed a sample of pupils' workbooks in lessons and in the inspection base. I spoke to pupils about their work and their views of the school and listened to two pupils from Year 1 and two from Year 4 read. I observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime and lunchtime. A range of documents were considered relating to safeguarding. I examined the school improvement plan, the school's monitoring of its own performance, and its assessment and tracking of current pupils' progress and attainment. I scrutinised pupils' achievement in the 2016 and 2017 statutory assessments. I reviewed the 16 responses to Parent View and a number of comments made by parents, carers and governors using the free-text facility. In addition, I reviewed the five responses to the staff questionnaire and scrutinised the school's website.