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Mr Chris Steele
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Steele

Short inspection of Fairfield Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 3 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in October 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Together with the staff, you have created a warm, welcoming and vibrant school that sits at the heart of the local community. You were appointed as headteacher in September 2017 and have been quick to take effective action to bring about improvements. School development planning and the school self-evaluation are both accurate and realistic.

When the predecessor school was last inspected, school leaders were asked to improve the quality of teaching. You now work in close collaboration with several local schools. Together, you have created a structured calendar of the monitoring and school improvement activities that you engage in together. You make careful checks on the quality of teaching in the school. You involve your middle leaders when observing teaching and learning, both in your school and in your partner schools. As well as observing in lessons, you talk to pupils regularly about their work. You engage staff through detailed pupil progress and performance management meetings.

You have developed the roles and capacity of leaders in the school since you were appointed. Teachers take on responsibilities for different subject areas. You encourage them to work with colleagues from partner schools and to engage in professional development activities facilitated by outside providers. For example, one member of staff has recently completed the national qualification for middle

leadership. Staff that I spoke with were knowledgeable and clear about their roles as leaders in the school.

Pupils told me about the many positive changes that you have brought to the school. They said that bullying and name-calling are very rare and that behaviour in lessons and around school is good. Pupils told me about their favourite subjects and shared some examples of their best writing with me. They said that they really enjoy the many school trips and residential visits that are on offer in the school. They enjoy taking part in their daily one kilometre walk around the school grounds, as they know that keeping fit and staying healthy is important. Pupils told me about the many religions that they have learned about this year. They know about staying safe online and when not in school. Pupils are polite and well mannered. Their good behaviour in and out of lessons is a strength of the school.

Parents and carers that I spoke with, and those who responded to the Ofsted online survey, were positive in their views of the school. Parents appreciate the efforts that you and the staff make each day to be visible and accessible if they wish to speak to you. They said that communication has improved since you were appointed as headteacher. One parent, with a view typical of many, said: 'This is a nice school. The teachers are fantastic and approachable. They always want to help.'

Governors have a good understanding of the many strengths of this school. They are honest in their views of what needs to improve further. Governors hold you to account well through effective challenge. They support you as you develop in your role. Governors have ensured that all safeguarding measures are in place and they check them regularly.

Safeguarding is effective.

Together with the deputy headteacher, who is the designated safeguarding lead, you have made safeguarding a top priority. You work well with several partner agencies to ensure that children are safe. There is an effective culture of safeguarding in the school which carefully considers the nature of the school site. Checks made on the suitability of adults to work in school are thorough.

Inspection findings

- Results from the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2016 and 2017 were below the national average. As a result, you put clear plans in place to bring about improvements. The delivery of phonics is now much more focused to match the needs of pupils. You have invested heavily in training teachers and teaching assistants in the delivery of phonics. Children in the early years and pupils in key stage 1 now receive their phonics lessons in small groups with others of a similar ability. This approach is having a positive impact on pupils' progress.
- Published pupils' performance information for the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2 in 2016 and 2017 showed that writing outcomes were lower than those which pupils achieved in mathematics and reading. Outcomes for boys in key stage 1 have been low when compared to other boys nationally. Pupils'

performance information indicates that girls do much better at writing than boys at Fairfield Primary.

- You have identified writing as a key priority on the school development plan. You have put actions in place to improve writing outcomes. One of the actions introduced has involved pupils having more opportunities to talk about their writing and engage in drama and speaking and listening activities. This strategy has led to an improvement in pupils' writing. Carefully selected high-quality texts are linked to each year group to engage boys better. You make regular checks on the quality of writing across the curriculum. For example, in Year 3, pupils write in detail about the parts of a plant in science. In English, the same pupils have created in-depth studies of characters from Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet'. Inspection evidence shows that pupils are now making good progress in writing. However, pupils do not apply a consistent handwriting style to all aspects of their work. This is not modelled effectively by teachers.
- Pupil performance information indicates that differences in boys' and girls' writing have diminished this year for those reaching the expected standards. Significantly more boys are now working at the expected standards by the end of key stage 1. However, the proportion of boys working at greater depth has fallen. You said that this decline has highlighted that the most able pupils are not consistently applying their spelling, punctuation and grammar skills to achieve greater depth. The actions that you have put in place to bring about further improvements in writing are not embedded. The most able boys are not sufficiently challenged to reach greater depth.
- You have ensured that pupils benefit from a broad and rich curriculum that takes advantage of the unique geographical setting of the school. Your starting point for the design of the curriculum was to create a sense of place for your pupils. You have ensured that the curriculum prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain. They have opportunities to engage in challenging topics such as Fairtrade and social justice. You have recently invited guest speakers into school to help pupils to think of possible future career choices. Science, technology, engineering and mathematics are key components of the curriculum, as is the application of skills to tackle real-world problems. For example, pupils recently applied their knowledge of hydrodynamics to create a way of transporting water safely. The whole school takes part in your annual 'Invention Convention'. This allows pupils to apply their creative skills to create and design machines for different purposes. You have recently opened this up to local schools in the form of a friendly competition.
- Creative use of the outdoor environment is a key element of your curriculum. You have ensured that there are many enrichment activities to bring the curriculum alive. These include forest schools, regular visits to museums, residential trips and the recent whole-school 'grand day out'. Active lifestyle choices are central to the curriculum. Recent successes in sports have seen the girls' cricket team make it through to the regional finals. The hockey team is heading to the county championships. You have ambitious plans to engage all pupils in sports and outdoor activities. You have recently introduced the 'active families' initiative, which currently attracts a high number of pupils and parents to participate in organised sporting events on Saturday mornings.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- as part of the continued efforts to improve writing, teachers and pupils use a consistent handwriting style in all aspects of teaching and learning
- they continue to embed the strategies introduced to strengthen outcomes in writing for the most able pupils in key stage 1.

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

Yours sincerely

John Donald
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we visited classes in all key stages. We looked at examples of pupils' writing in the classes that we visited. I spoke to a group of pupils about their experiences of school. I considered the 11 responses to the pupils' survey and the three responses to the staff survey. I considered the 73 free-text responses and the 122 responses to Parent view, Ofsted's online questionnaire.

I met with parents before school and I considered one written response that I received from a parent. I met with four members of the governing body and four members of your middle-leadership team. I held a meeting with the deputy headteacher, who is the designated lead for safeguarding.

I reviewed a range of documentation, which included the school self-evaluation, the development plan, records of monitoring, safeguarding records and training logs.