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Mrs Caroline Mackenzie
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Mackenzie

Short inspection of Whitegate CofE Primary 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 November 2013.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

You took up the post of headteacher in September 2016. Following your appointment, there was a period of significant change in the staff team, and only one teacher remains at the school who was there at the time of the previous inspection. However, the staffing situation is now more settled. Current staff are fully supportive of your leadership. All members of staff who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire said that the school is well led and managed, and that leaders treat them fairly and with respect.

Parents and carers are supportive of your leadership, and this is reflected in all aspects of the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, which have been made over the past year. A typical parental comment was, 'The new head and new staff have really made a positive difference. This small village school has developed and changed itself dramatically over the last year. Great thanks should go to the school staff for working through these changes.'

At the previous inspection, school leaders were asked to make further improvements to the quality of teaching, so that more was typically outstanding. The decline in outcomes since that inspection indicates that teaching has not been strong enough in all classes. Although improvements have been made to the

standards being achieved in reading, the teaching of other subjects, including writing and mathematics, needs improvement so that more pupils make stronger progress.

At the previous inspection, inspectors also recognised the school's many strengths, including the outstanding quality of pupils' personal development, behaviour and safety. This aspect of the school remains a strength. Pupils' behaviour throughout this inspection was exemplary. The pupils with whom I spoke were polite, articulate and keen to tell me about their positive experiences at Whitegate school. They enjoyed telling me about their school dog, Buddy, who attends school every day and is a friend to all pupils. The Year 6 pupils I met talked with great excitement about their residential visit and their upcoming performance of 'The wind in the willows'. They also spoke about their love of art and music, and were keen to show me the high-quality collages celebrating different world cultures that they had recently created.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding at Whitegate. As the designated senior leader, you ensure that all safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and are fit for purpose. All actions taken to support pupils' safety and well-being are carefully documented, including the outcome of contacts with any external agencies. There are clear procedures for making the necessary checks on all adults who work with pupils at the school. Governors are fully aware of the school's safeguarding policies and procedures. The designated safeguarding governor visits the school regularly to help ensure that all statutory requirements are met.

Inspection findings

- The first line of enquiry I explored during this inspection was to establish how successful leaders have been in improving pupils' progress across key stage 1. The proportion of children who leave the early years with a good level of development has been at or above the national average for the past three years. However, pupils' attainment at the end of key stage 1 has been well below average, particularly in writing and mathematics. I saw evidence in books that key stage 1 pupils are now making better progress in mathematics. The work set is challenging for most pupils, although not enough is being done to extend the most able. Pupils are also making good progress in reading. However, progress in writing remains a concern. Too many pupils are working below the expected standard for their age, and too few are working at greater depth.
- My second line of enquiry was related to the teaching of phonics, as the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the phonics check at the end of Year 1 was well below the national average in 2017. This is an area which requires further improvement. Leadership of the phonics programme is not good enough. Teachers, and other adults who support learning, are not deployed effectively to support this aspect of learning, and some do not have the necessary subject knowledge. As a result, many pupils do not make strong progress in developing this aspect of their reading.

- Although phonics teaching is not as effective as it should be, pupils do make strong progress in reading as they move through the school. In key stage 2, many pupils read widely and often. Those pupils I talked to had read many class novels during the past year and demonstrated a good knowledge of children's authors. The school's most recent assessments show there has been a significant increase in the proportion of pupils who are working at the expected level and the proportion working at greater depth.
- My third line of enquiry related to bullying. Around one fifth of the parents who had responded to Parent View expressed concern about how the school deals with bullying. I found strong evidence to show that bullying is dealt with effectively at Whitegate. Bullying incidents are rare. When they do occur, they are dealt with sensitively and carefully logged, and parents are involved where this is appropriate. The Year 6 pupils I spoke to said that bullying has not been something they have experienced during their time at the school. However, a small minority of the pupils who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire said that bullying is a problem from time to time. School leaders are aware of the need to be constantly vigilant in this area. They are aware of the concerns that some parents have about bullying and have discussed this as an agenda item at one of the termly open meetings held with parents.
- My final line of enquiry was related to the progress that pupils make across key stage 2. Over recent years, progress has only been broadly average, and few pupils have attained higher standards at the end of Year 6. Progress in reading has improved significantly. Many pupils read widely and often, and the school's own assessments indicate that a large proportion are now exceeding the expected standards. There are also signs, in pupils' books, that pupils are making better progress in mathematics. However, the lack of challenge provided in some classes means that a below-average proportion of pupils are reaching higher standards. Progress in writing across key stage 2 remains a weakness. Although there are some signs of improvement, too many pupils are working at levels below those expected for their age. School leaders are aware of this weakness. A new subject leader has been appointed and has already gained a clear understanding of what needs to improve and has developed good plans to improve the quality of teaching in this key area.
- I also looked at the quality of work in the wider curriculum. There are some strengths; for example, inspectors saw some high-quality art work. Pupils also said that they enjoy physical education and drama lessons. However, pupils do not learn well in geography, history and science. Teaching lacks challenge in these subjects and pupils make too little progress as a result.
- Although school leaders' self-evaluation is too positive, the school's improvement plans are succinct and accurately highlight the areas which need to be improved further. However, these plans do not contain the detail which would enable senior leaders, including governors, to more effectively review whether actions have had the required impact.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the teaching of writing improves so all pupils make good progress and more pupils are working at greater depth
- more challenge is provided in mathematics for the most able pupils
- pupils develop secure knowledge, understanding and skills in geography, history and science
- the school's improvement plan is more effective in enabling senior leaders, including governors, to check more rigorously on pupils' progress
- adults are deployed effectively and have the necessary subject knowledge to teach phonics well.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Tomkow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held meetings with the headteacher and the subject leaders for English and mathematics. I met with four governors, including the chair of the governing body. I spoke with staff and pupils. I visited classrooms with the headteacher, to observe teaching and learning and spent time looking at the quality of work in pupils' books. I met with a group of Year 6 pupils to talk about various aspects of school life and listened to them read. I observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at lunchtime. I reviewed a wide range of documentation, including the single central record and other safeguarding documentation, the school's self-evaluation, the development plan and records relating to behaviour and bullying. I also took account of nine responses to the staff questionnaire, 77 responses to the pupils' questionnaire and 49 responses to Parent View.