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Mr John Jolliffe
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mr Jolliffe

Short inspection of Newton St Cyres Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 17 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 December 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since your appointment as executive headteacher of Newton St Cyres in January 2016, you have made an accurate assessment of the school's improvement priorities. This has included ensuring that pupils, particularly the most able pupils, are challenged sufficiently. You have been effective in supporting staff to tackle this priority, particularly in mathematics.

You, your governing body and the head of school have set a clear direction for the school to ensure that it continues to prosper. Your focused and determined leadership sets the tone for the whole school community. As a result of your intervention, middle leaders have successfully strengthened their effectiveness in their roles. Consequently, pupils experience an engaging and challenging curriculum. You and other leaders have high aspirations for staff and pupils. Pupils are motivated and well supported by teachers to achieve well.

You have worked well with the governing body of the school. Collectively, you have used the systems for managing the performance of staff to successfully improve teaching. Consequently, current teaching supports pupils' better understanding of how well they are doing and what to do next to secure further progress in their learning. This has addressed a recommendation from the previous inspection that pupils learn to think for themselves about how to improve their work.

You and the governing body have acted positively upon other recommendations from the previous inspection. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve in mathematics have been raised. Pupils now routinely use their mathematical skills in practical contexts. Furthermore, pupils, including the most able pupils, are able to move quickly on to work which challenges them. This is because teachers carefully plan activities at different levels of complexity to support, as well as challenge, pupils' thinking. Pupils say that 'it's more fun when you challenge yourself'. They are confident, enthusiastic and motivated to attempt the more difficult writing or mathematical tasks. However, currently, few of the most able pupils achieve the highest standards in their writing.

Parents and carers are highly supportive of the school. Almost every parent who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend the school. All agree that their children are happy, safe, well looked after and taught well. Parents are effusive in their praise for the energy, enthusiasm and professionalism of the staff, which result in their children loving coming to school and achieving well. One parent commented for many, affirming that 'My children study hard but are able to have fun and their personalities are allowed to shine.'

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding because you, your governors and your staff make the safety of pupils a high priority. All staff and governors are appropriately trained in identifying possible signs of risk and harm. Statutory guidance for recruiting and vetting new staff is followed diligently. The governor responsible for safeguarding frequently checks that the school's single central record is maintained accurately. Governors also check that policies and procedures work effectively and that record-keeping is of good quality.

Parents recognise the lengths that staff go to provide a welcoming and inclusive environment for all pupils. Your work to personalise support plans for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities ensures that all members of the community are cared for and valued.

Attendance has been consistently above the national average for three years and continues to improve. Pupils are happy and safe and look forward to coming to school. Since the school moved into a new building, the safety of the school site is very much improved. Pupils feel safe and are confident that, if they have any concerns, an adult will help them. E-safety is a high priority for the school and pupils were able to explain in detail how they keep safe online. Pupils have a good understanding of what constitutes bullying and say that it rarely happens in school. Where there are occasional friendship issues in the playground, pupils know that an adult will 'sit them down' and help them to sort out the problem. Parents agree overwhelmingly that their children are safe in school.

Inspection findings

- One aspect I looked at was how leaders ensure that higher-attaining pupils make good progress in mathematics. This was because, for the last two years, the progress made by the most able pupils in mathematics has been in the bottom 10% of schools nationally.
- There has been a considerable improvement in attainment for the most able pupils in mathematics. This is as a result of careful planning by teachers to ensure that pupils are effectively challenged and motivated in lessons. Pupils enthusiastically choose to work on tasks that make them think harder and give them a sense of achievement. They can explain their reasoning fluently and logically apply their skills to practical activities exceptionally well.
- Most recently, leaders are making good use of a new bespoke tracking system to identify the most able pupils who have not made good progress in the past. This system enables leaders to quickly put additional support in place to ensure that these pupils begin to make rapid progress. However, this leadership strategy is not yet used to track the progress of all pupils in the school. As a result, early identification and support for some pupils are not yet accessible quickly enough. Senior leaders' checks on the quality of teaching and learning are not currently sufficiently focused on all pupils' progress from their different starting points.
- Middle leaders have provided teachers with effective support. As a result, pupils' thinking and reasoning skills have developed. Pupils are able to work independently and show greater resilience when tackling problems. Pupils' attainment is generally in line with, and sometimes better than, the national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. However, in the past, teaching has not enabled pupils to reach the higher standards. Current teaching is enabling more pupils to achieve well.
- My final line of enquiry looked at some inconsistencies in the accuracy of pupils' punctuation, grammar and spelling compared to their writing skills, particularly for the most able pupils.
- Scrutiny of pupils' writing books showed evidence that current pupils use punctuation and grammar effectively and spell well. Unvalidated 2018 tests show that more pupils are reaching the higher standards in grammar, punctuation and spelling compared to the national average. However, the most able pupils still need to make better progress to meet the higher standards in their writing overall.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school's tracking and assessment system targets pupils' progress more accurately and as early as possible so that pupils make rapid progress
- more of the most able pupils make good progress to reach the higher standards in writing.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Jane
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I visited classes with you and your head of school. Together, we looked at the work in pupils' books in lessons, as well as looking separately at pupils' work in detail. I talked with pupils during our visits to the classrooms, as well as in a separate discussion group to listen to their views of the school. I met with your middle leaders, as well as four governors, including the chair of the governing body. I took account of 20 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and considered 12 free-text responses. I also considered 13 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire and 34 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire. I reviewed the school's website and information about the school's academic performance. I considered a range of documents, including your summary of the school's effectiveness, the school's improvement plan and external reports. I also reviewed documents relating to safeguarding, including the school's central record.