

27 September 2018

Mr Ian Carroll  
Executive Headteacher  
Forest of Teesdale Primary School  
Forest-in-Teesdale  
Barnard Castle  
County Durham  
DL12 0HA

Dear Mr Carroll

### **Short inspection of Forest of Teesdale Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 12 September 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 2014.

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.**

The few years following the last inspection saw a substantial decline in pupils' progress. You and the governing body did not manage to prevent the negative impact of factors that contributed to this decline. In particular, changes in staffing and the tensions caused by the potential closure of the school caused instability.

The developing reorganisation of leadership across the small cluster of schools you lead is beginning to make a positive difference. For example, the capable new deputy headteacher is already casting a fresh eye over the school and introducing appropriate strategies. However, despite small improvements in pupils' progress, weaknesses in the quality of teaching and the curriculum remain. As a result, the very small number of pupils currently in the school are not catching up quickly enough, especially in reading and writing.

Overall, leaders have not made enough progress in addressing the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. The main area for improvement was to improve the rates at which pupils, especially the most able, make progress. Teachers have not challenged pupils, especially the most able, well enough. The inspector, at the last inspection, asked leaders to ensure that work in geography, history and science becomes harder as pupils grow older. The work in pupils' books over the last year shows no significant difference in how hard the work is for pupils

of different ages and abilities. Consequently, pupils have not made good progress across a wide range of subjects.

You have responded more successfully to one area for improvement highlighted in the previous inspection, which was to ensure more opportunities for pupils to write at length and to complete more challenging work in mathematics. Teachers give pupils plenty of opportunities to write. This has helped them to build more stamina in their writing. However, pupils' ability to spell, to use a variety of sentence structures, and to punctuate their work is generally weak. Pupils' progress in mathematics is better than in reading and writing because the teaching of mathematics has improved.

Pupils benefit from a range of appealing curriculum experiences that broaden their horizons. The school is situated in a protected area of outstanding natural beauty. Teachers exploit the opportunities this affords, such as outdoor and adventurous activities and learning about nature. You have helped children develop an understanding of life beyond the local community through achieving the International School Award. Pupils' knowledge of the cultures and faiths most represented in modern Britain is, nevertheless, limited.

Pupils develop well personally, socially and physically. They get along well together, are respectful of each other and of adults, and exhibit good manners. They develop confidence and largely enjoy school. The provision of sports and physical education activities is strong.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You have ensured that safer recruitment practices are properly followed and that the record of checks on adults is accurate and complete. All staff have been fully trained in their duties, know what to do, and to whom they should report if they have concerns.

The building is safe and secure. Pupils are properly supervised when they are in the exposed school grounds. Adults teach pupils how to stay safe, including when online. Pupils trust adults and say that their teachers are good at helping them to resolve conflicts.

During the inspection, leaders made needed changes to the child protection policy, so an up-to-date version that more fully reflects the latest statutory guidance is now in place. Governors understand their safeguarding duties but do not check safeguarding arrangements systematically and regularly enough.

### **Inspection findings**

- The curriculum is suitably broad and balanced, giving pupils a wide range of valuable experiences. These experiences make a positive contribution to pupils' personal and social development. However, the curriculum is not planned in a

way that helps pupils to acquire knowledge progressively in each subject over time. Furthermore, you have not checked to make sure that teachers' assessments help them to plan and deliver harder work for older pupils and the most able. As a result, pupils' progress across a wide range of subjects is too slow.

- Few pupils have been well prepared for their move to secondary school. This is because teaching has not helped them to make enough progress to reach the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics. More recently, current pupils' progress is improving in mathematics because teachers are more successfully helping pupils to develop their reasoning skills, to solve problems and to use the most efficient methods of calculation. Progress in reading and writing is weak. Teachers have failed to cultivate an interest in reading, so pupils read too little and not often enough. Teachers' expectations of pupils' spelling and punctuation are not sufficiently high. Teachers have been unsuccessful in helping pupils to develop their sentence-writing skills.
- The checks leaders make on the quality of teaching, such as observing lessons and examining pupils' workbooks, have not been effective in helping teaching to improve quickly enough. Leaders check to make sure that pupils are engaged in their work and doing enough work. However, leaders place too little emphasis on the specific impact of teaching on pupils' learning. Consequently, leaders do not shine a bright enough light on whether teaching results in enough progress.
- Forest of Teesdale is the smallest school in the country to earn the full International Award. A wide range of activities and events have helped pupils to develop an understanding and appreciation of life beyond their local community. Experiences have been predominantly linked to Western Europe. Weaknesses in the RE and geography curriculum have resulted in pupils knowing too little about other faiths and cultures that are most represented in modern Britain, such as Asian, African and Eastern European cultures. Furthermore, pupils' knowledge and understanding about gender diversity is limited.
- The governing body generally keeps on top of most of its statutory responsibilities, including keeping an eye on the stretched budget. However, governors have placed too much emphasis on what leaders have done and not enough on the difference that these actions make. Leaders do not give governors sufficiently detailed information about the progress that pupils make. Consequently, the governing body is not properly assured that pupils receive the quality of education they deserve. Governors have not been tenacious enough in the way they challenge leaders. Although safeguarding is effective, governors do not keep a close enough eye on safeguarding arrangements.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- governors more regularly and systematically check that all safeguarding matters are in order
- governors receive more useful information about pupils' progress and more

tenaciously challenge school leaders about rates of progress across a wide range of subjects

- the checks leaders make on the quality of teaching are more systematic and emphasise the specific impact of teaching on pupils' learning
- teaching improves more quickly so that:
  - more pupils reach at least the expected standards, in reading and writing especially and in mathematics
  - those who have the potential reach higher standards
- curriculum plans for history, geography, science and religious education are revised so that:
  - all pupils acquire knowledge and understanding systematically and securely over time
  - the most able pupils especially are well challenged
- pupils learn more about faiths and cultures represented in modern Britain, so that they are better prepared for life outside the community in which they live, and so that pupils understand more about gender differences
- pupils develop positive and regular reading habits.

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

Yours sincerely

Philip Riozzi  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

Together, you and I observed lessons and discussed the impact of teaching on pupils' learning. Along with the new deputy headteacher and the teacher who was, until recently, the acting assistant headteacher, we examined the work in pupils' workbooks alongside assessment information. I listened to the most able pupil in the school read. You and I discussed the actions taken since the last inspection. I met with the chair and vice-chair of governors and a representative from the local authority. I listened to what the pupils in key stage 2 had to say about what it is like to be a pupil in the school. I met with teachers and other staff. There were no responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, or to the staff and pupil surveys. I looked at a range of documents, including the school self-evaluation statement, the school improvement plan, minutes of governing body meetings, notes of local authority visits to the school, and notes of leaders' checks on the quality of teaching.