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Mr Ian Johnson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Johnson

### **Short inspection of Nenthead Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 3 October 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 February 2014.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, the staff and governors have created a warm, caring and welcoming environment. Pupils, their parents and carers are rightly proud of their school. The sense of belonging within the district is a strong feature of the school. One governor described Nenthead as 'the jewel in the crown of the community'.

Governors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and the context in which it works. They work effectively with leaders to secure the best provision for pupils. They know the school well and offer you, and other leaders, considerable challenge. They make a positive contribution towards moving the school forward. The local authority adviser knows the school's strengths and weaknesses well and is confident in the leadership of the school. This is a view echoed by the governing body.

The majority of parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, were positive about the work of the school. They typically commented on how happy their children are at school. One comment summed up the many positive responses: 'The school is a happy and supportive environment where children are nurtured and encouraged. The standard of teaching is high. There is a good family feel to the school environment and the children always appear happy.'

Pupils are well mannered and display very good attitudes to learning in class. They work sensibly together and settle to tasks quickly. Pupils told me that they would recommend the school to others, for example saying, 'Teachers look after us and help us if we are struggling. This is a special school, like a family. Our work is hard but fun.'

At the previous inspection, leaders were asked to ensure that good practice in teaching is shared across the school and the federation. Training for teachers and shared planning have resulted in staff's improved subject knowledge and higher aspirations for pupils' achievements. There is now greater consistency to teaching and learning within year group teams. There is a strong sense of everyone contributing to the development of teaching and learning within the school. Leaders were also asked to improve the plans for school improvement. The school's action plans contain success criteria that focus on the impact of leaders' actions on pupils' achievement. With strong support from your deputy headteacher, you track the progress of individual pupils and groups of pupils accurately and scrutinise their achievements closely. These actions have contributed effectively to successful teaching, pupils' strong progress and the continuing improvement of the school. Leaders were also asked to improve outcomes in writing. We agreed to focus on this as part of the inspection.

During the inspection, we discussed the next steps required to enable the school to improve further. Leaders' own evaluation accurately highlights that further work is required to improve spelling at key stage 2 and develop pupils' stamina for writing at length. Pupils' reasoning skills in mathematics also require further development.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team ensures that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The record of the checks made on adults so that they can be considered safe to work in school is accurate. There is a culture of care and support which runs throughout the school. You and your staff are vigilant in safeguarding matters. Your thorough knowledge of each pupil helps you to know when they are facing difficulties.

Pupils are very happy at school. They say that behaviour is good and that bullying is not an issue. Adults teach pupils how to stay safe. Pupils know about the risks involved in social networking and online bullying. You provide support to staff members to ensure that they carry out their safeguarding duties effectively. You liaise closely with outside agencies so that the most vulnerable families and pupils remain safe. There are well-understood systems in place for staff to report concerns. The designated safeguarding leaders act quickly and resolutely to follow up referrals made to other agencies.

### **Inspection findings**

- We agreed several areas of enquiry for this inspection. The first was to evaluate the effectiveness of actions taken by leaders to improve pupils' outcomes in English. Teachers analyse pupils' reading assessments to identify the key reading skills which need strengthening. We observed how teachers develop pupils' comprehension skills. Pupils of different ages told me that they enjoy reading. Leaders ensure that pupils read regularly to staff and adults. Your assessment information shows that pupils' progress in reading is good. Information indicates that the teaching of phonics is a strength. Although younger pupils' phonic knowledge is good, the spelling skills of some pupils in key stage 2 are not strong enough. Leaders have put in place strategies to improve pupils' spelling skills, but there is still more work to do.
- Teachers use assessment information well to plan work effectively for pupils. Good-

quality work on the topic of bacteria in science has developed pupils' scientific knowledge and their report-writing skills. Current pupils make good progress in writing. This was clear in your own assessment information and in pupils' books. Although standards in writing are improving, not all pupils learn to write at length in subjects beyond English and science.

- Another line of enquiry for the inspection was the effectiveness of actions to improve pupils' outcomes in mathematics. Teachers' subject knowledge is strong in mathematics and ensures that there is greater accuracy in the assessment of pupils' mathematics skills. Work on improving pupils' mathematical fluency has also been effective. Teachers provide pupils with challenging tasks. Pupils are now becoming confident in applying their calculation skills to solve problems. Pupils' books show that activities give them valuable mathematical challenges in science and humanities. Planned work also builds effectively on pupils' prior knowledge. For example, pupils in key stage 2 used their existing secure knowledge of place value to solve subtraction problems. As a result, pupils' progress in mathematics is good. Even though standards have improved, staff do not develop some pupils' reasoning skills deeply enough to enable them to tackle complex, unfamiliar problems successfully.
- The third line of enquiry was to consider the effectiveness of the curriculum in improving pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding. You have developed a curriculum which is well considered and provides pupils with lots of real-life experiences. Pupils are acquiring the knowledge, skills and understanding that they need across a range of subjects. Pupils enjoy their learning, particularly their practical experiences, such as studying the journey of a river from its source. Staff use such memorable activities well to build learning. For example, by studying rivers, pupils developed subject-specific vocabulary and knowledge. They learned what happens when two or more bodies of water join together to form a single channel. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted very well across the curriculum. Pupils value the principle of equality and gain a good understanding of different faiths and cultures, supporting them to become well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The fourth line of enquiry was to explore the absence rates of a small number of pupils. You have thorough systems for monitoring attendance. You keep a close eye on those pupils that are not attending school regularly, particularly those who are vulnerable. Your increased focus on these pupils has resulted in a reduction in the number of pupils who are absent from school. You hold parents to account where a pupil's attendance falls short of your high expectations. As a result, pupils' attendance is now in line with the national average.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils use their reasoning skills well when tackling complex, unfamiliar problems in mathematics
- pupils' spelling in key stage 2 improves further
- pupils can write at length in different subjects.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools

commissioner and the director of children's services for Cumbria. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Simon Hunter  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I spoke with pupils, both formally and informally, about their work and school life. I held meetings with you and your deputy headteacher to discuss school improvements. Together we looked at learning in pupils' books. I also spoke with an adviser from the local authority.

I reviewed documentation, which included your evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for improvement and the school development plan. I considered 13 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and one response from the online staff survey. There were no responses to the pupils' survey.

You and I visited classes to observe pupils' learning. I met with governors to discuss aspects of school leadership and management. I reviewed a range of documentation about safeguarding, including the school's record of checks undertaken on newly appointed staff.