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Mrs C Sharp
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Dear Mrs Sharp

Short inspection of Hawkshead Esthwaite Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 9 January 2019, 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 July 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 joining the school in 2017, you have worked in an effective manner with governors to lead the school through a period of substantial change in terms of staffing and school organisation. The support that you have received from the local authority has been highly beneficial and, working together, you have been successful in bringing about school improvement, ensuring that the needs of the pupils are well met.

The vast proportion of parents and carers who I spoke with during the inspection were very positive about the school. All parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, said that their children are happy in the school and feel safe. However, a minority of parents who spoke with me and who responded to Parent View said that they would welcome further information and reassurance about the changes that are taking place in the school.

Pupils at Hawkshead Esthwaite Primary School are polite and very well behaved. Those I spoke with told me that they are proud of their school and that other children are kind to them. All pupils who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire said that they enjoy learning at the school. One pupil from Year 2 typically reflected the views of many others, saying, 'Everyone works very hard and we get our work done.'

The report of the previous inspection highlighted the fact that classrooms and outdoor areas contribute well to pupils' learning and that opportunities outside the school also enhance their learning and development. My observations in the school confirm that leaders and teachers have maintained these strengths. Teachers ensure that classrooms are well stocked with appropriate resources, and they use displays effectively to celebrate pupils' achievements and support their learning.

Leaders and teachers place great value on opportunities for pupils to learn outside the classroom and make effective use of the school's grounds. Pupils greatly enjoy taking part in early morning running before the start of the school day to develop their physical and mental well-being. Teachers also provide pupils with opportunities to learn beyond the immediate community. For example, on the day of the inspection, pupils from key stage 2 were competing in an inter-school cross-country running competition.

At the previous inspection, the inspector highlighted the need to improve teaching further to raise pupils' attainment, particularly in writing at the end of key stage 1. Leaders have been successful in addressing this issue. Teachers have received support and training to develop their skills in the way that they teach writing. A whole-school focus on developing pupils' vocabulary and spelling, punctuation and knowledge of grammar has been effective in raising their attainment. As a result, the school's most recent published performance information for pupils in Year 2 in 2018 showed that attainment was above that seen nationally at the expected standard for writing. This was also the case in reading, mathematics and science.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team ensures that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders undertake audits of safeguarding and of health and safety arrangements to ensure that pupils are safe. The school site is secure and members of staff check visitors' details on entry so that they pose no risk to staff or pupils.

Governors and staff receive training to ensure that they have an up-to-date understanding of safeguarding issues. Pupils are happy in school and trust adults to support them when they need help. The pupils I spoke with during the inspection have a clear understanding of what bullying is and feel that, on the rare occasions that it happens, teachers are effective in dealing with it. As a result, all pupils I spoke with, and those who responded to the pupil questionnaire, said that they feel safe in school.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, I shared with you a number of lines of enquiry. The first considered what leaders are doing to ensure that attendance remains high. A large proportion of your pupils attend school regularly. Pupils' attendance is broadly in line with that seen nationally. However, a small group of pupils has been persistently absent from school over the last year. You are aware of the reasons for this and are confident that this absence has been unavoidable.

Leaders are monitoring these pupils closely to ensure that this absence does not affect their overall performance in school.

- My second line of enquiry examined what actions leaders have taken to improve writing in the early years. Leaders have been effective in developing opportunities for children to improve their writing skills. Teachers provide children with a broad range of writing resources in the classroom and with opportunities to write across many areas of learning. For example, children write shopping lists in the role-play area and use clipboards, paper and pencils to write in their story area. Leaders ensure that children have many opportunities to develop their motor skills through regular physical play and practical activities. This work has been successful. The proportion of children achieving their early-learning goal in writing increased significantly in 2018 and was in line with performance in reading and mathematics.
- The next area we looked at was the impact of efforts made by leaders to ensure that pupils' attainment in phonics and reading improves to match their performance in other subjects such as science, grammar, punctuation and spelling. Leaders are working effectively to develop the teaching of phonics. In the Reception Year, teachers begin teaching phonics to children soon after they start school. Teachers in the Reception Year and key stage 1 ensure that they link pupils' phonics knowledge to wider learning in reading and writing. They ensure that they provide opportunities for pupils to apply their skills in other areas of the curriculum, such as writing. As a result, the proportion of pupils in Year 1 achieving the expected standard in the phonics screening check in 2018 increased considerably and was above that seen nationally.
- The development of the teaching of reading has been a high priority for leaders. Teachers ensure that pupils develop their reading skills in carefully timetabled sessions. Leaders use high-quality reading texts to develop pupils' reading and writing skills across the curriculum. For example, pupils in Year 6 produced high-quality pieces of writing around a story about life in Africa. Teachers were effective in linking this learning to pupils' work in history on the slave trade. This approach is developing pupils' interest in, and love of, literature.
- Pupils have access to a broad range of fiction and non-fiction books in their classrooms and around the school. Those spoken to during the inspection said that they love reading and particularly enjoy the 'raffle ticket' system which rewards pupils who read regularly at home. This focus on reading has been successful. In 2018, the school's published performance information showed that the percentage of pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 reaching the expected standard for reading was above that seen nationally.
- My final line of enquiry looked at how leaders and teachers ensure that the most able pupils reach the higher standards they are capable of in reading, writing and mathematics throughout the school. Leaders have received effective support from the local authority in training teachers to identify ways in which they can raise pupils' performance in reading, writing and mathematics even further. Teachers are using assessment information with increasing accuracy to identify precisely the necessary next steps in pupils' learning. Additionally, teachers are providing learning opportunities that support and challenge pupils appropriately.

As a result, the proportion of pupils reaching the higher standard in the school is increasing significantly. In 2018, the proportion reaching more than the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics in both Year 2 and Year 6 was broadly in line with that seen nationally. Leaders are aware, however, that challenging the most able pupils sufficiently remains an area of focus across the school so that the recent improvements remain consistent over time.

- Leaders work together to evaluate the school's strengths and areas for further development. Such evaluation includes a thorough analysis of pupils' progress and attainment. However, the judgements are sometimes unclear and based on criteria which are not fully up to date. This means that leaders cannot easily check on the school's progress towards improvement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they refine further their evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for development so that they can more easily check on the school's progress towards improvement
- pupils' attainment at more than the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics remains consistently in line with that seen nationally over time by the end of the Reception Year and key stages 1 and 2
- they develop further the channels of communication between the school and home, in order to reassure parents that leaders are managing change effectively, and to enable leaders and other staff to share and celebrate the school's many achievements.

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

Gill Pritchard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with pupils to gain their views of school life and their understanding of safety. I held meetings with you to discuss your school's evaluation of performance and safeguarding procedures. I met with the vice-chair of your governing body and one other governor to consider aspects of school leadership and safeguarding. I also met subject leaders to discuss my key lines of enquiry and spoke with the local authority general adviser/governor-support team manager.

I looked at pupils' progress in books and reviewed documentation, which included your evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for improvement, the school development plan and a selection of subject action plans. I considered 19 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, 16 responses from Ofsted's parents' free-text survey, four responses to the staff survey and 20 responses to the pupils' survey.

I visited all classes, together with you, to observe pupils' learning. I reviewed a range of safeguarding documentation, including a safeguarding audit and the school's record of checks undertaken on newly appointed staff.