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Mr Christopher Chilvers
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Chilvers

Short inspection of Middleton-in-Teesdale Nursery and Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 26 February 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 February 2015.

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.**

At Middleton-in-Teesdale Nursery and Primary school, you have addressed some, but not all, of the issues identified when the school was last inspected. At the last inspection, leaders were advised to improve the quality of teaching to raise standards further. In particular, leaders were asked to improve teaching and learning at key stage 1. These improvements have not taken place rapidly enough and inconsistencies remain. While you have ensured that teaching and learning have improved in key stage 2, the effect is less evident in key stage 1. For example, teachers' work on linking sounds and letters is not secure and lower-ability pupils are not always expected to achieve more in lessons. In addition, you do not evaluate the quality of teaching and learning in other subjects such as modern foreign languages and religious education.

There are marked improvements in specific areas, especially in statutory assessment outcomes in early years and key stage 2. By the end of Year 6, pupils' standards of attainment and progress are now in line with national outcomes in writing, reading and mathematics. The work you and your staff have done to develop pupils' reading skills in key stage 2 has had a positive effect on pupils' attitudes to reading. They enjoy the challenges set within their reading sessions and talk eloquently about authors, genres and books. Pupils say that they recommend

books to each other and will discuss their favourite texts. Work on reading out loud and using punctuation and grammar to aid expression is particularly evident.

The school's values are reflected in the quality of relationships between pupils and staff and in your expectations of pupils' behaviour. Pupils conduct themselves well when moving around the school. Staff who support pupils at lunchtime say pupils are respectful and they remember their 'pleases and thank-yous'. In lessons, pupils are considerate and generally hard working. They report that bullying is rare and, if it does happen, it is dealt with effectively by most staff. Pupils have positive attitudes to their learning and lessons. They work well together, respecting each other's ideas and applying themselves well to tasks. Lessons are often engaging and exciting. In addition, the early years provides opportunities for children to thrive emotionally and socially. However, your aspiration for pupils to be more aware of the wider world beyond Middleton-in-Teesdale is not being fully met, as pupils only have a partial knowledge of other cultures and lifestyles. They say they rarely have opportunities to discuss and clarify their understanding of issues such as racism and homophobia.

While pupils are increasingly well prepared for their next steps in education in English and mathematics, this is not evident in other subjects such as history and geography. This is because you do not systematically check on the progress pupils make in these subjects or that the timetable allocation is adhered to.

You and your governors have managed a range of disruptive issues in the school since the last inspection. Changes in leadership, staffing structures and introducing mixed-age classes have been a major focus of your work. As a result, some parents, carers and staff are not happy with the school. In addition, pupils' attendance at school is a current and increasing concern.

Governors have a wide ranging set of appropriate skills and have worked hard to keep pace with the changes taking place. They attend training to ensure that they have the required understanding to help improve the school. While they are committed to moving the school forward, they do not always participate in identifying, or have clarity about, what the school needs to do next to improve. For example, governors are aware that relationships with some groups of parents and staff are contentious and strained, but this has not directly informed the setting of school priorities.

Safeguarding is effective.

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Pupils and staff have supportive and strong relationships, which pupils say makes them feel safe. Your staff know the pupils well and work diligently to help pupils address their worries. You ensure a culture of safeguarding through training sessions and briefings for staff on a regular basis. The curriculum ensures that pupils are clear about how to keep themselves and others safe, including when online and in a range of other situations.

Effective systems help to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for

purpose, and they help to make sure that no lapses or inconsistencies in practice emerge. Your appointed governor regularly checks that you and your staff carry out their responsibilities to ensure that staff records and procedures are up to date. The processes for appointing suitable staff are robust.

Inspection findings

- Staff have worked hard to ensure that the standards being achieved by pupils at the end of Year 6 are improving. A significant dip in reading, writing and mathematics outcomes in 2016 has largely been addressed. Inspection evidence, including looking in pupils' workbooks, listening to children read and observing some lessons, shows that pupils now achieve well in key stage 2 in their basic skills. In addition, more are beginning to work at a greater depth of understanding. This is because the quality of teaching, particularly in key stage 2, is consistently good, and is supported by accurate assessments of what pupils need to do next to improve their understanding.
- In Reception and key stage 1 classes, pupils' progress is more inconsistent. For example, while the teaching of phonics is now systematically delivered, it lacks precision and accuracy. Teachers and other adults often articulate sounds incorrectly during lessons, and pupils' errors are not always corrected. As a consequence, pupils' achievements in their reading and writing are hindered. In addition, some tasks set for lower-ability pupils in key stage 1 lack sufficient challenge to ensure that they make the progress they need to.
- The school's information demonstrates that most pupils do make good progress from a variety of starting points in reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers use their positive relationships with pupils to help stimulate and motivate them. Learning is well-ordered and planned and provides engaging and interesting activities. As a result, pupils say that they enjoy their lessons. However, some pupils who need to catch up in their learning say that they sometimes don't understand what they are being asked to do.
- You make accurate assessments of the quality of learning across key stage 2, but you are not secure in your evaluations of learning in key stage 1 and early years. Recent turbulence in staffing has made the evaluation of learning across key stage 1 less secure, including when gauging the effect of phonics teaching. In addition, systems to check the effectiveness of teachers' work does not cover subjects other than English and mathematics. Consequently, you cannot be sure you have an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning in all subjects.
- The curriculum is strongly focused on establishing a strong core of basic skills in English and mathematics. However, it is not well planned across all subjects, such as in modern foreign languages, geography and history. These lessons are also missed out even when on the timetable. School leaders are not clear about how their curriculum fits together to maximise all aspects of learning. As a consequence, you cannot be sure of how well pupils are progressing in a range of subjects, and you lack clarity about how to encourage pupils to achieve and think at a greater depth. You have not identified this issue within your improvement priorities.

- Pupils spoken with say that they feel safe in school. They understand what to do if they feel worried, and they would approach most staff with a concern. Pupils can talk confidently about respecting each other's differences both in school and in the wider community, but they do not always have a clear understanding of prejudice and the associated appropriate terminology. They say they discuss these issues at home but cannot often remember discussing them in school. In addition, pupils have lapses in their knowledge of other faiths and religions beyond their own.
- The relationship of the school with some groups of parents is problematic. While the majority of parents are happy with the school, 38% of parents who responded to the online questionnaire provided by Ofsted would not recommend the school. Concerns were raised with regard to the support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and the timeliness and manner with which concerns and complaints are dealt with. You and your governors are aware of the situation but have not given a strong enough focus to addressing these concerns or repairing these relationships.
- Governors and your school leaders have rightly identified pupils' absence as an important issue, and this has led to actions to support and challenge families to ensure that their child attends school more frequently. Reward systems are now in place and additional capacity has been identified to track attendance, with individual targets for children being set. Despite these steps, actions to address low attendance are not yet having the desired effect. Pupils' attendance overall is below that seen nationally. The school's most recent attendance information shows a further decline in pupils' attendance, alongside an increase in the numbers of pupils who are frequently absent.
- Governors have a detailed knowledge of the day-to-day life in the school and are aware of some of the priorities that the school faces to improve further. However, the information they receive lacks clarity and does not always help them to fulfil their strategic role to best effect. For example, school improvement plans contain numerous priorities without identifying the most important issues that would make the biggest difference. In addition, some issues have not been identified or included in the school priorities, for example the lack of monitoring of the effectiveness of learning in all curriculum subjects. Consequently, governors are not equipped well enough with the information they require to hold you and your team to account. Governors do make sure that safeguarding is effective and that the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used to best effect.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- develop senior leaders' skills in identifying emerging issues more accurately so that the information reported to governors is well focused and concisely reflects key priorities
- develop curriculum planning for all subjects which is clear in its intent, implementation and evaluation so that pupils receive a broad and balanced

curriculum and can achieve a greater depth in their learning

- further improve the quality of teaching and learning, especially in key stage 1, so that phonics teaching is accurate and contributes effectively to raising expectations in pupils' reading and writing, especially for less able pupils
- ensure that effective action is taken to respond to parental and staff concerns
- continue to embed the sharper focus on improving pupils' attendance, including those that attend less frequently, so that absence at the school is at least in line with national averages
- continue to develop and clarify pupils' understanding of different forms of discrimination, including homophobia and racism.

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

Jonathan Brown
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held discussions with you, your assistant headteacher, a group of governors and with the local authority adviser. Together, you and I observed teaching and learning in classrooms. I listened to some pupils read, and I talked with a group of pupils about their experiences of school and looked at work in pupils' books. At playtimes, in lessons and around the school, I observed pupils' behaviour. I also took account of the responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, alongside the survey of staff views and comments. I also looked at a wide range of documentation, including information about the performance of pupils, the school's self-evaluation of its overall effectiveness, and information on the curriculum, safeguarding and other policies. I checked the school website to make sure it contained the necessary information that should be available for parents.