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Mr D Spencer
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Dear Mr Spencer

Short inspection of Fir Ends Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 March 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 November 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 and welcoming environment. You communicate your expectations clearly and your staff share your vision and ambition for pupils.

Governors work effectively to secure good teaching and to drive improvement. They visit the school frequently and have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. This contributes to the accuracy of the school's self-evaluation and allows leaders to identify timely priorities for improvement. Planned actions to improve the school are carefully monitored to make sure that they have the intended impact.

The parents spoken to during the inspection and those who responded to Parent View were mainly positive about the school. One comment, typical of others, noted: 'We couldn't ask for a harder working team who are always available to listen or discuss anything.' Pupils are polite and well mannered. They enjoy school and receive the help they need to do their best. They appreciate the opportunities for outdoor learning which enhance their education further.

At the last inspection, leaders were asked to improve pupils' writing skills. You have taken effective action to ensure that these skills have improved. Teachers model good speaking skills. They then extend pupils' vocabulary, knowledge and imaginative writing skills through the use of good-quality texts. Pupils are encouraged to write for

a purpose and they do so meaningfully across a range of subjects. In response to good teaching, pupils demonstrate their expansive vocabulary and improved use of grammar and punctuation in their writing. These actions contribute to pupils' good progress in writing. However, as improvements to the teaching of spelling are new, pupils' improvement in spelling is at an early stage.

You were also asked to develop the skills of middle leaders. You have built a team that is both enthusiastic and committed to do their best for pupils and each other. You ensure that staff have access to high-quality training. Middle leaders also have an increasing responsibility to ensure the quality of learning and assessment in their areas of responsibility. They are highly committed to raising standards. However, some middle leaders are still developing their skills and are gaining experience. Consequently, they have not had the opportunity to measure the impact of their work on improving pupils' skills and knowledge over time in subjects other than English and mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a clear culture of safeguarding in the school where everyone is committed to securing pupils' welfare. Staff know pupils and their families well. This helps them to provide timely and reassuring assistance when pupils need individual support. Safety is taught well through the curriculum. As a result, pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and say that they feel safe. Those that I spoke with were unaware of any bullying, but they were confident that, should any occur, it would be dealt with swiftly by adults.

Pupils recall in detail the advice they have received on how to stay safe online. Older pupils are also clear about the dangers associated with social media. You invite visitors, such as the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, to strengthen important safety messages to pupils. High-quality training for staff ensures that they know how to use the well-organised systems to report any concerns. Leaders also make detailed checks to ensure that all adults working in the school are safe to work with children.

Inspection findings

- We agreed several areas of enquiry for this inspection. The first of these was to look at the effectiveness of leaders' actions to improve pupils' outcomes at the end of key stage 1. This is because, in Year 2, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in writing and mathematics was below the national average in 2018. Your expectations are high and teachers set challenging and aspirational targets for pupils. In mathematics, teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to complete problem-solving and reasoning activities. This allows pupils to apply their growing knowledge of number. Work in pupils' books shows that they are progressing well in a range of mathematical topics. In English, there is a greater focus on handwriting and pupils have regular opportunities to practise their writing in different subjects. Pupils who struggle with letter formation are well supported to improve. Staff use focused questioning very skilfully to develop and extend pupils'

learning, for example in guided reading sessions. Developments in teaching have ensured that pupils in key stage 1 make good progress from their starting points. This is clear from the work seen in pupils' books and the assessment information held by leaders.

- The second line of enquiry considered the effectiveness of leaders' actions to improve pupils' progress in reading. Pupils make a good start on developing their early reading and phonic skills throughout early years and key stage 1 classes. You identified that, in reading, some pupils did not have the stamina to read at length. To address this, teachers provide pupils with reading books which are at the correct level for their reading ability and which also capture their interest. Pupils are particularly enthusiastic about being 'buddy readers'. They enjoy the opportunity to read and discuss books with children from other key stages. You have also introduced more opportunities for the development of comprehension and inference skills. These recent actions to raise the profile of reading have been effective. Pupils say they enjoy the whole-class texts that are read to them and this helps to develop their love of reading. Your focus on reading is having a positive effect on the progress of current pupils, who achieve well in this subject.
- Finally, we looked at the actions you have taken to improve pupils' outcomes in phonics. Leaders and teachers have reviewed the way in which phonics is taught. Staff accurately assess pupils' progress and identify pupils who require additional support. In early years, staff develop children's understanding of letters and sounds effectively when they engage them in reading and writing activities. This ensures that children's knowledge of the sounds that letters and words make effectively supports their early reading skills. As a result, pupils' achievement in phonics is good. By the end of Year 1, most pupils meet the expected standard in the phonics screening check. Those who do not are supported well so they catch up quickly. However, pupils do not consistently apply their phonics knowledge in their writing.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to develop the curriculum, so that pupils do work that builds systematically on what they have learned the previous year in subjects other than English and mathematics
- they continue to review the effectiveness of the teaching of phonics and spelling, so that pupils achieve consistently high 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 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 about their work and school life, both formally and informally. I held meetings with you and spoke with members of staff to discuss improvements in their areas of responsibility. I visited classrooms and outdoor activities, jointly with you, to observe pupils' learning. I also spoke with a representative of the local authority.

I scrutinised pupils' work to evaluate their learning over time. I spoke with parents and took account of 45 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including 22 free-text responses. I also took account of three responses to the online staff questionnaire and 21 responses to the pupil survey.

I looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, reports from external consultant visits and information about pupils' progress. I also evaluated safeguarding procedures, including policies to keep children safe, safeguarding checks and attendance information. I undertook a review of the school's website.