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Mrs Sally Hobson
Headteacher
Bedlington Whitely Memorial Church of England First School
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Dear Mrs Hobson

Short inspection of Bedlington Whitely Memorial Church of England First School

Following my visit to the school on 12 July 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 Bedlington Memorial school was judged to be good in June 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have provided effective leadership, which has led to the development of the school. You are supported well by your senior leadership team and governors, who are ambitious to provide the best possible education for pupils. Along with your leaders and governors, you have identified the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. You have been proactive in requesting support from the diocese and local authority to improve the outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. The school's self-evaluation and improvement plan identifies the correct priorities and actions for improving the school further.

Leaders, staff and governors have largely dealt with the areas of improvement identified at the previous inspection. Actions taken by leaders have led to improved spelling outcomes across school, as seen in pupils' books. Pupils now use teachers' feedback to improve their writing. Writing correctly remains a focus for the school. Last academic year, leaders were disappointed in the attainment and progress of pupils in writing across school; in particular, that of disadvantaged pupils. Prompt action has been taken to address these areas.

Leaders have maintained the previously identified strengths. Your school continues to offer a wide range of experiences for pupils. This strength has been further developed to provide exciting writing opportunities. You and your staff have invited actors into school, linked to curriculum areas; for example, on the life of Grace Darling to inspire pupils' writing. The quality of the work produced by pupils, as a result of this, is evident in books, on displays and in the enthusiasm pupils have for writing.

The proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard in the phonics screening check is broadly in line with the national average; almost all pupils attain the standard by the end of Year 2. The new phonics leader has been proactive in raising attainment in phonics, offering workshops for parents and carers and providing resources to support pupils' learning at home. The leader is keen to consolidate existing practice, to improve attainment further for disadvantaged pupils.

In 2018, pupils' outcomes in Year 4 and Year 2 are stronger than in 2017 and the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in school is diminishing in all subjects, including writing. This is not the case across school. The school's assessment information shows that in Reception, Year 1 and Year 3 there is a significant in-school attainment gap in reading, writing and mathematics. The school has an increasing number of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities; currently, twice the national average. In Reception, Year 1 and Year 3, a significant number of disadvantaged pupils have SEN and/or disabilities; this lowered the overall attainment of pupils in these year groups. Progress across this year for almost all disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities in reading, writing and mathematics is strong. Leaders, staff and governors recognise, however, that it is essential that they ensure that disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities sustain high rates of progress, so as to maximise their attainment and ensure they achieve their potential.

The pupil premium and SEN leaders track the individual attainment and progress of pupils rigorously. You use pupil premium and special educational needs funding effectively to put interventions in place; for example, speech and language sessions for pupils. Leaders and governors actively seek new ways to best support pupils who are disadvantaged and those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.

During our visits to classrooms, pupils engaged well with their learning and worked hard. This is because teachers plan work that matches pupils' needs and interests well. Pupils could confidently explain to me what they were learning and what they were aiming to improve. Teachers work hard to ensure that pupils receive feedback, in line with the school's policy, that supports continuous improvement. Pupils told me one of the best things about your school is the staff and that they make learning fun.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your governing body afford a high priority to keeping pupils safe and there is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. They carry out appropriately stringent checks on staff, governors, and volunteers to make sure that they are suitable to work with pupils. You ensure that all staff and governors receive regular and appropriate training, including training about how to protect pupils from radicalisation and extremism. Staff, therefore, know how to execute their duties in protecting pupils and keeping them safe.

Leaders have ensured that provision relating to pupils' emotional well-being is well established. Leaders and governors have made sure that the school is well resourced with knowledgeable and caring staff who provide support for vulnerable pupils. For example, leaders and governors have provided a sensory area for pupils who require this provision. You and your staff work effectively with parents and other agencies and take prompt action if you have concerns about a pupil's welfare.

Despite leaders' proactive stance with regard to attendance, pupils' attendance in 2017/2018 represents no improvement from the last academic year. Leaders, including governors, recognise the need to improve attendance rapidly, particularly for those pupils who are frequently absent. Leaders, including governors, are currently developing a further action plan to improve attendance.

Inspection findings

- You, and your staff, have worked hard to improve pupils' outcomes across the school. Consequently, pupils' progress and attainment are broadly in line with national averages at the end of key stage 1 and Year 4 in reading, writing and mathematics. Your leaders for early years, English, phonics, mathematics and SEN check the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes regularly and act promptly to make the improvements needed. All leaders are aware of the differences in attainment for disadvantaged pupils in Reception, Year 1 and Year 3 when compared to that of pupils nationally. School improvement plans focus on accelerating the attainment of this group and ensuring that pupils' attendance improves and fewer pupils are regularly absent from school.
- Staff readily share their expertise with each other to improve attainment for pupils. For instance, the phonics leader provides weekly phonics training for teaching assistants to ensure that pupils receive high-quality phonics teaching. You now provide small group interventions and have a focus on frequently used and alien words. This focus has helped pupils achieve higher phonics scores. You now plan to embed this approach.
- Teachers use assessment information well to target pupils' learning. During our visits to classrooms in Year 4, pupils were provided with individual and small group support to develop their mathematical skills. Precise questions and clear explanations by teachers and teaching assistants supported pupils in solving a challenge related to coordinates. In another Year 4 class, pupils had designed their own zoo. They demonstrated that they understood how to work out the perimeter and area of animals' enclosures. Pupils calculated staffing costs and used a range of calculation skills effectively using number up to one million. This challenging task provided pupils with the opportunity to use and apply their mathematical skills in a real-life situation. Pupils demonstrated high levels of concentration. All pupils, including those who have SEN and/or disabilities and the disadvantaged, made good progress as a result of the tailored support they received.
- During short visits to classrooms we observed pupils who were engaged in exciting writing opportunities. They were able to explain the importance of sentence starters and demonstrated how they used success criteria to improve their writing. Pupils in Year 1 explained clearly how the school marking system helped them improve their

work. Pupils talk about the vocabulary they will use in their stories, act the story out and plan carefully before writing. This approach is being embedded across school. Pupils write for a range of purposes and audiences and write across a range of curriculum subjects: history, science and religious education. Vibrant displays celebrate pupils' work.

- Pupils shared examples of their work in writing and mathematics with the inspector which demonstrated that the most able disadvantaged pupils were working above expectations for their year group's national programme of study and were making good progress. The attainment of some less able disadvantaged pupils was below the national expectation; however, from their different starting points these pupils had also made strong progress.
- In early years, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development is in line with the national average. During our visit to the Reception class, children discussed, acted out and wrote their story. Children were immersed in the task and produced quality writing. In our discussions you told me how this approach used by the school has had a positive effect on pupils' attainment in writing and encouraged pupils to write independently. In the outdoor area, however, there were missed opportunities to develop the children's writing through role play. Children's books including those of disadvantaged pupils, demonstrated an emphasis on correct letter formation and the children's ability to write at length.
- The school's core values are reflected in the way that pupils treat each other. Pupils report they enjoy being heard to read in school by adults and enjoy receiving reading awards. Pupils feel safe in school and know how to keep safe. They understand what bullying means and if they have a problem, know that staff will help them sort it out. Pupils are polite and courteous; they listen carefully to each other and adults. They have a good awareness of internet safety and know it is important not to speak to people they don't know online.
- The majority of parents are positive and proud of their children's school. They feel that the school keeps them well informed of their children's progress. Parents particularly appreciate the opportunities they have to visit the school and work with their children; for example, in the number and phonics workshops. Some parents said that they would welcome further opportunities to do this.
- Governors have benefited from a range of development opportunities to support them in their roles. They are knowledgeable about school improvement priorities and challenge the headteacher and leadership team. Their collective aim is to ensure that all pupils achieve their full potential.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the whole-school approach to teaching phonics and writing is more firmly embedded
- disadvantaged pupils sustain high rates of progress so as to maximise their attainment at the end of key stage 1 and the end of Year 4
- pupils' attendance improves and fewer pupils are regularly absent from school.

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

Yours sincerely

Frances Gowland
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection I discussed the work of the school with leaders. I held meetings with leaders for English, mathematics, early years, the pupil premium and special educational needs and disabilities. I visited two classes across school and conducted short visits to classrooms. I met with a group of pupils and heard pupils read. I spoke by telephone with the deputy director of the dioceses of Durham and Newcastle and the school's improvement partner. I met with four governors, including the acting chair of the governing body and the governor with responsibility for special educational needs. I scrutinised a range of documentation relating to governors, teaching, safeguarding, bullying, exclusions of pupils, referrals, pupils with care plans and attendance. I analysed pupils' current progress and attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. I considered 66 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and information received during the inspection and considered the school's recent survey of parents' views.