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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Belinda Athey
Headteacher
Whittingham Church of England Primary School
Whittingham
Alnwick
Northumberland
NE66 4UP

Dear Mrs Athey

Short inspection of Whittingham Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 7 February 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 March 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 have worked closely with your team and the wider school community in leading the school's successful transition from a first school to a primary school. You have developed leadership roles in the school and made successful appointments to support the increased curriculum demands in Years 5 and 6. You have embraced this change positively and used this as an opportunity to review the school's core ethos and purpose, so that additional year groups are seen as an integral part of the school and not simply as a bolt-on. You have worked with the local authority and diocese improvement partners to develop the curriculum and check the accuracy of standards.

You have successfully addressed many of the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. Your team has shown considerable success in developing pupils' awareness of phonics. This has progressed from what was previously an intervention strategy, to a core aspect of your teaching in the early years and key stage 1. Teachers and teaching assistants are highly effective in developing pupils' reading skills, and the overwhelming majority of pupils achieve the required standard in the phonics screening check over a three-year period. The quality of teaching has also showed continued improvement, with much outstanding practice taking place in the early years provision.

Leaders and governors have enhanced the roles of senior and middle leaders. Subject leaders for English and mathematics have an increased role in sharing good practice. Your deputy headteacher supports you in checking the quality of teaching

and pupils' progress. You have recently appointed a full-time early years teacher who is building on the good-quality provision in this area. Middle leaders are introducing new initiatives to enhance the provision they are responsible for and further increase pupils' progress. New reading programmes are being implemented, while numeracy leaders are reviewing the curriculum to increase opportunities for reasoning and problem solving. At present, some of the strategies to intensify pupils' progress in English are more developed than those in mathematics.

You and your team are responding positively to the increased demands of the national curriculum. In 2017, pupils achieved strong outcomes at the end of key stage 1. The proportions of pupils reaching and exceeding expected standards were well above those seen nationally in the majority of areas. The local authority moderated your outcomes in 2017, and your standards were found to be accurate. You continue to work with local schools and school improvement partners to check the accuracy of standards. You embrace partnerships with other schools and external partners to ensure that the momentum for ongoing improvement is sustained.

Governors and local authority partners value your commitment to the school and your continual ambition to raise standards, widen pupils' experience and maintain high standards of welfare. They have worked with you to balance your own teaching commitments with the time needed to provide strategic oversight as headteacher. Some school systems do require development. You identified that the previous assessment system did not provide you with a sharp enough picture of current progress and you are working with local authority partners to enhance this. Similarly, while there is much effective support for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, some of the systems to monitor the effect of this support are less effectively developed.

You continue to encourage your team to be forward looking. Your school development plan has long-term goals as you explore how the curriculum and the experiences you provide will equip pupils with the skills, knowledge and personal attributes which will support them in later life. You and your team have expanded pupils' horizons through wider links with universities, work places and the wider community to develop pupils' social skills and their awareness of possible next steps in life. You have worked and continue to work with external partners to raise pupils' understanding of equality and diversity to prepare them for life in modern Britain. Parents and carers, as well as pupils, appreciate the benefits of the wider curriculum as it develops pupils' experience of the world and their personal self-confidence.

The governing body is committed to the ethos of the school. Governors value the school's distinctive rural character but at the same time seek to extend pupils' experiences and outlook. They are regular visitors to the school to check pupils' progress and welfare. They use the additional views of the local authority and the diocese to provide them with objective insights into the school's performance. They provide an appropriate balance of support and challenge. The current enhancements to the school assessment system will enable them to monitor the effect of the provision more effectively.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. School leaders and members of the governing body check the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures through regular audits of practice. Leaders make appropriate checks on the suitability of adults working at the school and are suitably trained in safer recruitment. Leaders ensure that staff receive up-to-date training on a range of safeguarding issues. The headteacher pursues concerns over pupils' welfare thoroughly.

Pupils spoken with said that they feel safe in school, and the vast majority of their parents agree. They said that bullying is extremely rare and that staff are highly effective in addressing any potential instances of bullying. Pupils were able to discuss the actions they could take to remain safe, for example the actions needed to stay safe online. Pupils develop a sense of road safety through cycling sessions that are adapted to address potential hazards in their rural setting.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have managed the school's transition from a first school to a primary school extremely effectively. They have marked the transition with symbolic changes, such as a new school ethos and a new school uniform. Leaders have made successful appointments with a teacher from middle school to provide additional expertise in Years 5 and 6. Leaders have worked closely with local authority and diocese improvement partners to develop the curriculum and ensure continuity between lower and upper key stage 2. There are many signs that this change is being well led, as reflected in areas such as the high standards of writing in Years 5 and 6. However, developments remain at an evolving stage, and leaders will need to check the ongoing effect of developments in this important area.
- Leaders are introducing new strategies to enhance teaching in mathematics. Pupils were seen using practical methods to enhance their understanding of two- and three-dimensional shapes. Teachers are also introducing increasing opportunities for pupils to develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills. Indeed, it is a feature of much learning at the school that teachers and teaching assistants frequently ask pupils to explain the reasons behind their answers. However, while pupils' books do show increasing opportunities for problem solving, these approaches are not consistently developed across all classes.
- Pupils achieve good outcomes at the end of key stage 1, with above-average proportions of pupils achieving the expected standards and reaching a greater depth of understanding in the majority of learning areas. Leaders and teachers set high expectations for pupils so that they build on the high standards achieved in the early years.
- Thorough planning, clear routines and positive relationships help children to make extremely strong progress in the early years. Teachers and teaching assistants know their children extremely well and meet their needs effectively.

They use questions and prompts to deftly prompt children to think, reflect and make connections with previous experiences and learning. Pupils make very good progress and achieve outcomes that are well above those seen nationally.

- The overwhelming majority of pupils enjoy their learning and their school experience. They are proud of their school and the opportunities it provides for them. This is reflected in their high rates of attendance that are well above those seen nationally. Pupils behave positively and show respect for one another and adults. Teachers cultivate a positive learning environment where pupils show high levels of engagement and focus.
- Teachers enhance pupils' learning through regular opportunities to enrich their experience through the wider curriculum. Pupils have numerous opportunities to work outdoors through programmes that develop their understanding of the environment and their local area. At the same time, visits to universities and involvement in science events expand their understanding of the wider world and future careers. Pupils have opportunities to develop their cultural awareness by experiencing and participating in theatrical and musical productions. As a result of accessing a comprehensive range of additional activities, pupils develop their self-confidence and their social skills.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- reflect on the ongoing effect of new curriculum developments as the school continues to prepare pupils for key stage 2
- embed new approaches to mathematics teaching to further accelerate pupils' progress across all classes
- refine new assessment systems to support teachers' planning and to help leaders review pupils' ongoing progress in a succinct and timely manner
- enhance the provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities by developing more cohesive systems to review the effect of additional support.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the diocese of 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

Malcolm Kirtley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

As part of the inspection, I explored the actions taken by leaders to manage the school's transition from a first school to a primary school. I also looked at the actions that leaders were taking to continue to raise standards at key stage 1 and to support improving pupils' progress in mathematics. Furthermore, I explored whether high rates of pupils' attendance were being sustained and looked at the quality of provision in the early years.

During the inspection, I met with you, and senior and middle leaders. I also spoke to five members of the governing body, including the chair and vice-chair. I held a meeting with a group of pupils and talked to pupils less formally in lessons. I also talked to the school improvement partner from the local authority. I looked at learning in lessons with you. I also looked at pupils' work in books and folders. I examined the school improvement plan as well as other documents, including the school's self-evaluation, behaviour and attendance records and assessment information. I examined safeguarding documents, including the single central record. I took into account 25 responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire and 13 parent free-text responses. I also took into account 57 responses to the pupil questionnaire and nine responses to the staff questionnaire.