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Mrs Wendy Goddard
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Goddard

Short inspection of Bellingham First School

Following my visit to the school on 3 October 2017, 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

Since the last inspection, you and your governors have undertaken the necessary actions to ensure that pupils make good progress in a calm and purposeful learning environment. Along with your governors, you have a realistic and accurate view of the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. You have put in place a detailed improvement plan that identifies relevant actions to improve the school further. The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Leaders have successfully tackled the first area for improvement from your previous inspection. The actions taken to raise standards in mathematics in the early years and key stage 1 have had a positive effect. When we visited mathematics lessons together and reviewed samples of pupils' mathematics work in books there was clear evidence that teachers provide pupils with greater opportunities to develop their problem-solving and reasoning skills. Leaders and staff ensure that pupils make good progress in mathematics. By the end of key stage 1, the proportions of pupils working at the expected standard and at greater depth are above the national averages. Similarly, in the early years, children make good progress and the proportion of children who achieve the expected standard by the end of Reception is higher than that found nationally.

The second area to address was to improve the quality of teaching in specific aspects around pupils' skills in checking their progress, the quality of teachers' feedback for improvement and improving pupils' handwriting and presentation.

When we reviewed pupils' work in their English books we saw that there are now clear systems in place to enable pupils to improve their work and to check that they are using the correct grammar and punctuation required for their age. Teachers' focus on improving handwriting is having a positive effect, although this is not as evident with some of your lower-attaining pupils.

Your work with the school improvement partner has helped you to sharpen your approaches to checking the quality of teaching. You know where there are areas of strength and where further development is required to develop the consistency of the good quality of teaching across the school. The actions to share effective practice within school and observe good practice in other schools, both within and beyond the local authority, are having a positive effect. You have clear plans to continue this approach.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that current safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and effective records are maintained. You, your staff and governors place great importance on keeping pupils safe, and there is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. Leaders carry out appropriate checks on all staff, governors and volunteers. Staff and governors receive regular and appropriate training so they know how to keep pupils safe. As a result, they understand safeguarding procedures and their own responsibilities.

Your curriculum helps pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including when they are online. Pupils know the different forms that bullying can take and know that staff will help them if they ever have concerns. Furthermore, they report that they have not encountered any bullying at your school and that the behaviour of other pupils is good. During playtime, staff supervised pupils vigilantly and pupils played well together or socialised in quieter areas in the playground.

Inspection findings

- You have a systematic approach to checking the quality of teaching and evaluating pupils' progress. This has secured a focused approach to school improvement. You work effectively with other leaders and governors to take action that has resulted in good outcomes for pupils across the school.
- Provision for children in the early years is strong. High expectations and positive relationships between staff and children ensure that children grow in confidence and develop well. There is an effective balance of adult-led teaching and interesting activities for children to choose from that motivate them to learn. For example, following a teacher-led session on the properties of two-dimensional shapes, children then selected from a range of activities in the outdoor area specifically set up to reinforce this learning. As a result, children in Reception make good progress. In 2017, the vast majority of children achieved a good level of development and were well prepared for starting Year 1.

- The school's links with the pre-school provision are well developed and some pre-school sessions take place alongside your Reception children. This helps with continuity in the planning for children's learning. It also helps children from pre-school to make a positive transition into the Reception class.
- You check the quality of teaching and pupils' progress regularly. Where these have not been strong enough, you have taken action to address this. This has included visits to other schools to consider effective practice. You also have plans in place to continue to share effective practice from within school. Consequently, pupils make good progress by the end of Year 2. The school's results compare well to the national average for reading, writing and mathematics. Similarly, in Year 1, the proportion of pupils who achieve the expected standard in the phonics screening check is consistently above that found nationally.
- Across key stage 2, pupils continue to make good progress. By the end of Year 4, your records show that the vast majority of pupils reach the expected standard for their age, with many working above this.
- The recent development of your pupil progress tracking system linked to the national curriculum is helping leaders, governors and staff to check the achievements of pupils. This approach is also providing detail about vulnerable groups and the effect of your interventions to support them. You recognise that there is further work to do to embed this system. Similarly, although you and your staff meet with other teachers to check the accuracy of your assessments, you know that this is an area for further refinement.
- You and your school attendance officer monitor pupils' attendance thoroughly. Where pupils' attendance is a cause for concern, you work with parents to address this. Overall attendance levels compare well to the national average. In the past, however, the absence of some pupils, particularly that of vulnerable groups, has been too high. Your actions have led to some improvement in this area. You and your governors regularly check that this improvement is continuing.
- The subject leaders for English and mathematics have taken relevant actions to improve the quality of teaching and assessment in their subject areas. For example, in mathematics there are more opportunities for pupils to develop their problem-solving and reasoning skills. In English, there is evidence that the focus on developing handwriting and presentation is beginning to improve this aspect of pupils' work. However, the skills of these leaders require further development to enable them to further drive improvements in their subjects and to check for the effect of actions taken.
- Governors have a clear understanding of the strengths and priorities for the school. They are ambitious to ensure the best outcomes for pupils and provide an appropriate balance of support and challenge. Governors enhance their understanding of the school through their link-governor roles. For example, the chair of the governing body ensures that regular audits of safeguarding practice are completed. She also visits school to review the effect of developments in the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Similarly, the link governor for early years meets regularly with early years leaders to discuss developments and assessments in early years.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching and learning continues to improve through sharing effective practice within school and through observing strong practice in other schools
- the recently developed approaches to tracking pupils' progress and moderating teachers' assessments are embedded and used consistently to ensure good or better progress for all pupils across the school
- the leadership skills of the English and mathematics subject leaders are further developed to enable them to drive improvements and to check for the effect of actions upon pupils' outcomes.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Reeves
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I discussed the work of the school with you and your leaders for English, mathematics and early years. I observed and spoke with pupils during playtime and at other times during the day. I met with the representative from the local authority and with two governors who were able to provide me with additional information. I took into account school documentation, assessment information, policies and information posted on the school website. I considered the 17 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View. I reviewed the seven responses to Ofsted's pupil survey and the six responses to Ofsted's staff survey. Along with you, I visited three classes to observe teaching and learning. I looked at pupils' English and mathematics work to help evaluate the quality of teaching and learning over time. I considered behaviour and attendance records and information relating to safeguarding.