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Mrs Sarah Brett  
Holywell Village First School  
Holywell Village  
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Dear Mrs Brett

### **Short inspection of Holywell Village First School**

Following my visit to the school on 29 June 2016, 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 September 2010.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

You have set a strong, ambitious vision to improve the school. This is well understood by all the school's staff. Along with the deputy headteacher and other school leaders, you have clearly identified the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. The school's development plans are well matched to these priorities and senior leaders and governors have established effective systems for checking improvement. The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You and your staff have created an inclusive, welcoming and friendly school where pupils' academic and personal development are equally important. Pupils feel safe, grow in confidence and develop good learning behaviours. You, your staff and governors are aspirational for pupils' learning and set high expectations for pupils' achievement. Pupils were keen to tell me that staff are kind and helpful and that they make learning fun.

Overall, the school has successfully tackled the two areas identified for improvement at the previous inspection. Firstly, in 2015 pupils' achievement in mathematics by the end of Year 2 matched that found nationally. Your current pupil progress information shows that you are continuing to build upon this improvement across the school. You have put in place more opportunities for pupils to extend their learning across other curriculum areas. For example, the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) day held during the inspection motivated pupils and encouraged them to make links across these subjects. The development of mathematics to match the requirements in the new national curriculum has been

a focus for improvement. This is beginning to have a positive impact. However, you agree that some of the developments, in relation to challenge for pupils and opportunities for mathematical reasoning and problem solving, are not yet firmly established.

The second area for improvement at the previous inspection was to improve progress for most-able pupils in the early years. This has also been tackled. Opportunities for challenge are built into the early years provision. Although there was a dip in the proportion of children achieving a good level of development in 2015, you have taken swift action to address this and increasing proportions of Reception children who are working at levels above that expected for their age.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You, your staff and governors give the highest priority to keeping pupils safe. Leaders and governors have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are of high quality. Careful checks are carried out for all staff, governors and volunteers. Leaders have updated safeguarding and behaviour policies to ensure that all requirements are met and all staff understand the procedures and their own responsibilities. Staff and governors receive regular and appropriate training so they know how to keep pupils safe. Your online safety ambassador provides useful training and information for staff, pupils and parents. Referral to other agencies is well managed. Close links with external agencies ensure that pupils and their families receive the help and support they need to keep pupils safe and in education.

Pupils are well taught about how to keep themselves safe, including when they are online. Effective strategies, such as the 'worry box', are well understood by pupils and ensure that pupils' anxieties are promptly addressed by staff. Pupils have a good understanding of the different forms that bullying can take and know that staff will help them if they ever have concerns. You have very effective approaches to teaching pupils about bullying which have been recognised nationally and locally. Racist incidents are extremely rare and are rigorously followed up by school leaders. Parents and staff agree that behaviour is good and that pupils are safe.

### **Inspection findings**

- You and your deputy headteacher have a clear vision of how to move the school forward to the next stage of development. Staff have a thorough understanding of your priorities and are motivated to accomplish the best outcomes for pupils. Parents' views of the school are highly positive, as confirmed by their responses to the Ofsted Parent View online questionnaire.
- Governors provide good strategic challenge and support for leaders. They are ambitious to achieve the best academic and personal development outcomes for pupils. Well-planned and regular checks of the impact of school improvement work provide governors with a good understanding of the school's strengths and priorities for further action.
- Subject leadership in English and mathematics, provided by you and your deputy headteacher, has a positive impact on improving pupils' outcomes in

these subjects. The appointment of an English subject leader from September 2016 is to increase subject leadership capacity.

- You have in place thorough systems for checking the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school. Findings from this monitoring are well used to plan training, which continuously improves the quality of teaching. Appropriate support is promptly put in place where teaching is identified as being less than good.
- You have worked hard to create a curriculum which motivates pupils to learning. Pupils talk enthusiastically about the different subjects that they enjoy. On the day of the inspection there was a 'buzz' around the school as the pupils engaged in the STEM day, supported by older pupils from a local high school.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons and at social times is good. They work hard and are keen to share their learning with adults. Pupils are proud of the responsibilities that they hold. For example, pupils could explain clearly their role on the school council and how they could make improvements in school.
- In some year groups across the school there remains an attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils. You and your staff are working hard to close these gaps and carefully track the progress of these pupils.
- The teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) is well structured and teaching is carefully matched to pupils' level of development. As a result, the proportion of pupils who are achieving the expected standard has been above that found nationally for the last two years. Leaders are responding promptly to the dip in the school's 2016 phonics results.
- You and your staff are working hard to further improve the quality of mathematics teaching and to take account of the developments in the mathematics national curriculum. Relevant training and checking for improvements are having a positive impact. You agree that the consistency of improvements is not yet fully embedded and remains an area of focus.
- The proportion of Reception children achieving a good level of development dipped in 2015. Your prompt action, including increasing parental engagement, topics to promote writing and increased challenge for children, has been fruitful. Overall, these actions have increased the proportions of children who are achieving a good level of development this year. As a result, a greater proportion of children are well prepared for starting Year 1.
- The early years leader knows the strengths and areas for improvement in this area of the school. However, middle leadership is not fully developed. Rigorous checking of the quality of teaching and learning across early years and involvement with senior leaders in self-evaluation judgements is an area that requires further work.
- Systems for measuring and recording pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics are generating useful information. Staff are using this information with growing confidence to match teaching to meet pupils' needs. Leaders use this information to good effect to check the progress of all pupils. Our review of mathematics books found that there is some scope for further challenge in mathematics.
- Pupils' attendance levels are above the national average. This is because

leaders and staff have effective systems in place to encourage high attendance and to monitor where this is not high. Pupils understand the importance of attendance and enjoy being in school and learning.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the actions taken to further improve pupils' progress in mathematics are fully embedded and that the strong practice found in some classes is shared more across the school
- middle leaders are provided with the skills and opportunities to check the impact of actions in their areas of responsibility and support school self-evaluation judgements.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the executive director of wellbeing and community health service 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, the deputy headteacher and the early years leader. I talked with pupils about what it feels like to be a member of the school community and looked at the responses from 71 parents to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View. I observed and spoke with pupils during playtime and at other times during the day. I held discussions with a representative of the local authority and with three governors who were able to provide me with additional information. I also took into account school documentation, assessment information, policies and information posted on the school website. I considered the responses to the eight staff questionnaires. Alongside you, I visited every class to observe teaching and learning. We looked at pupils' work to help us evaluate the quality of teaching and learning over time.