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Mrs Nichola Brannen
Executive Headteacher
Longhorsley St Helen's Church of England Aided First School
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Dear Mrs Brannen

Short inspection of Longhorsley St Helen's Church of England Aided First School

Following my visit to the school on 31 January 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 2012.

This school continues to be good.

Since your appointment as executive headteacher in January 2015, you have provided exceptional leadership, which has brought about significant improvement to the school. Along with your other school leaders, you have accurately identified the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. Your school self-evaluation incorporates well into the plan to drive improvement further. You, your leaders and governors make good use of the opportunities that the school's federation with Whalton Church Of England Aided First School provides to develop leadership, improve the quality of teaching and widen pupils' experiences. The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You, your staff and governors have a thorough understanding of the community that you serve. You take every opportunity to be directly involved with activities which both contribute to the community and develop pupils' learning and personal development. Levels of parental satisfaction with the school are extremely high. Parents' responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and in the comments made to the inspector were overwhelmingly positive.

You and your staff have created a caring, friendly and harmonious school. Pupils feel safe, grow in confidence, and develop good learning behaviours. Equally, you, your staff and governors set high expectations and aspire to help all pupils achieve

the very best outcomes. Your thoughtfully designed curriculum supports both pupils' academic and their personal development.

You have successfully tackled the area identified for improvement at the school's previous inspection. You have put in place practical strategies to share expertise within the federation. For example, opportunities for teachers to plan together, to assess the quality of pupils' work, and joint staff meetings help teachers collaborate and consider how to improve their practice. You have revised your approaches to assessing and recording pupils' progress. The detailed assessment sheets in pupils' books are helping staff to record pupils' progress more accurately against national curriculum expectations. Teachers and leaders use this information to monitor pupils' progress effectively and to identify where any pupils are not making the required progress. Well-targeted interventions are ensuring that pupils are catching up where this is the case. However, you recognise that while high proportions of pupils achieve the expected levels in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2, there is still more work to do to increase the numbers of pupils working at greater depth, particularly in writing.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that current safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are of a high quality. You, your staff and governors give the highest priority to keeping pupils safe. Leaders carry out appropriate checks for all staff, governors and volunteers. The updated safeguarding policy meets current requirements and staff understand the procedures and their own responsibilities. Staff and governors receive regular and appropriate training so they know how to keep pupils safe, including training about how to protect pupils from radicalisation and extremism. Leaders manage referrals to other agencies effectively.

Staff provide pupils with teaching and guidance about how to keep safe, including when they are online. 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. Playground buddies take their role very seriously and were keen to tell me how they support other pupils at playtime.

Inspection findings

- Since your appointment, you have successfully identified the key priorities to address and have acted promptly to drive forward improvement. You have taken appropriate steps to manage some of the changes to staffing. This has included support and development to increase leadership capacity and skills. Teachers who are new to the school make a positive start to their teaching because leaders provide them with guidance about the school's expectations and systems.
- You make effective use of the opportunities provided by the federation to develop leadership capacity, increase collaborative practice for teachers and to widen experiences for pupils. Leadership development for the assistant headteacher and the leader for English and assessment is improving their leadership skills. Shared expertise provided by the special educational needs

coordinator also builds leadership capacity. Meetings for staff across the federation, to share practice and work together, strengthen the quality of teaching and assessment. Visits by pupils to the other school in the federation and joint events widen pupils' experiences and develop their confidence and social skills. This supports older children with their transition to the middle school.

- Governors have a secure understanding of the strengths and priorities for the school. This is because they regularly visit the school to check the impact of actions taken by leaders on pupils' outcomes. They provide a good balance of support and challenge to you and other school leaders. Governors use their knowledge of the school's action plan to identify where their strategic decisions can help drive improvement further. For example, arrangements to provide the assistant headteacher with an interim period of non-class-based time add leadership capacity and support current improvement initiatives.
- Along with the leader for assessment, you have revised the school's approaches to assessment and recording pupils' progress and attainment. While this is still work in progress, your systems now provide you with improved information about pupils' outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics. As a result, teachers can plan learning activities which better match pupils' needs and leaders can check pupils' progress more thoroughly.
- By the end of Year 2 the proportions of pupils achieving the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics are above the averages found nationally. However, you have accurately identified that more pupils need to be working at greater depth. You have revised your approaches to the teaching of reading and writing and are checking that this is having an impact upon pupils' outcomes. Although there are some early signs of improvement in pupils' books, your current pupil progress information shows that there is still further work to do. Our review of pupils' books showed that the quality of pupils' handwriting is variable. You are aware of this and are currently reviewing your approach to teaching handwriting.
- Following training, teachers are now providing pupils with more opportunities to develop their mathematical reasoning and problem-solving skills. As a result, there is early evidence in pupil progress information and in books that pupils are making improved progress in mathematics.
- Children start in the Nursery with skills and abilities that are generally typical for their age. Most children make good progress and the proportion achieving a good level of development has been above that found nationally for the last three years. However, in 2016 there was a dip in the number of children achieving a good level of development. Information for the current children in early years indicates that some are not making fast enough progress in reading, mathematics and particularly writing. When we visited the early years classrooms, we noted that opportunities for children to develop these skills, through activities that they choose are not well developed. Leaders have identified the need to improve the quality of provision in early years as a priority. You have arranged for an audit of early years provision. An improvement plan, along with appropriate coordinated support from the local authority and from the diocese, is now in place.

- High staff expectations, a nurturing atmosphere and responsible roles around school effectively develop pupils' personal and social skills. As a result, pupils' behaviour in lessons and at playtimes is exemplary. Pupils work hard, are kind and supportive to their peers and display good manners.
- You check the attendance of pupils carefully and the school's overall level of attendance compares well with the national average. You have taken action to improve the attendance of pupils whose absence levels are too high. As a result, there are overall improvements in the attendance levels of pupils across the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the plan for developing learning in the early years, including developing opportunities to accelerate children's progress in reading, mathematics and particularly writing, is fully implemented and checked for impact
- teachers and leaders make effective use of the schools' recently developed pupil progress tracking information to ensure that the number of pupils working at greater depth, particular in writing, is increased.

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 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 assistant headteacher and the leader for English and assessment. I talked with pupils about what it feels like to be a member of the school community. I observed and spoke with pupils during playtime and at other times during the day. I held discussions with the local authority representative and with four governors, including the chair of the governing body, 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 26 responses to the parent questionnaire, Parent View. Alongside you, I visited three classes to observe teaching and learning, during which time I listened to pupils from a range of abilities read. We looked at pupils' writing work to help us evaluate the quality of teaching and learning over time. I also considered behaviour and attendance records and information relating to safeguarding.

This inspection particularly focused upon the following aspects of the school's work:

- leaders' impact on addressing areas for improvement in the previous inspection report, the accuracy of the school's self-evaluation and quality of the school improvement plan
- the extent to which the federation with Whalton Church Of England Aided First School is used to extend opportunities for sharing effective leadership and staff expertise and to widen pupils' personal and academic development
- leaders' and staff actions to increase the number of pupils achieving greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics
- the impact of leaders and staff actions to improve pupils' attendance levels
- children's progress from their starting points in the early years and learning opportunities to improve children's reading, writing and number skills further.