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Mrs Lynn Carini
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Dear Mrs Carini

Short inspection of Holme St Cuthbert School

Following my visit to the school on 22 March 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 January 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You are passionate about your school and you lead a dedicated team of staff. You have created a friendly, safe place for pupils to learn and pupils, parents and governors are positive about the changes that you have implemented. There is a strong focus on each pupil developing their own individuality and confidence. Classrooms are bright and displays are vibrant and colourful. When working, pupils are encouraged to engage in purposeful discussion. As a result, even the youngest pupils work well together and they remain focused on the task at hand.

The governors I spoke to are very knowledgeable about the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are aware of the improvements made since the last inspection, which recommended a stronger focus on mathematics to raise pupils' attainment by the end of Year 6. Published data shows that pupils now make good progress and attain well in mathematics by the end of their time at your school. This has been achieved by providing pupils with opportunities to use mental calculation methods when solving problems. Governors ask searching questions in meetings to provide you with support and challenge. This has improved greatly over the last three years.

Another area for improvement recommended at the last inspection was the development of pupils' awareness of real-life contexts for their learning. This informed one of the key lines of enquiry for this inspection about the design of the curriculum.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership of safeguarding in the school is very strong. Your awareness of new updates shows a vigilant attitude, which is reflected in the staff, who embody the approach that 'it could happen here'. As a result, pupils are safe and they feel safe. Staff are kept informed through regular staff meetings and are up to date with current guidance. They receive regular training. Pupils have a very good awareness of safety issues through a keen focus on safety in the curriculum, whether this be bullying, 'stranger danger' or online safety. The school is proud of its strengths in safeguarding that sustain the focus on keeping pupils secure and happy.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection we agreed on a number of key lines of enquiry. The first of these was to check how effectively leaders and governors are improving the progress and attainment of pupils in mathematics in lower key stage 2 following a dip in the previous year's performance data. Governors are aware of the actions taken to improve mathematics and are monitoring this closely. Leaders set high targets for pupils' progress. Leaders have unpicked the reasons for the slower progress of small groups of pupils and have taken actions to remedy this. You have improved the way that you moderate pupils' work, which means that teachers can identify the next steps for pupils and provide support more effectively. The result has been improved rates of progress for the pupils presently in the school. Challenge is evident in the work in pupils' mathematics books. The most able pupils are set tasks which focus on problem-solving and stretch their thinking in a wide variety of contexts. When asked if they found their work challenging, all pupils agreed that they did.
- Staff are developing a shared understanding of the standards that pupils are expected to reach and the skills required to attain them. However, some inaccuracies in assessment still exist. The work in pupils' books shows progress to be better than some assessment information suggests. You and other leaders monitor teaching in all subjects but do not focus enough on identifying clear areas to improve teaching and learning. Records also show that staff, particularly teachers, have not had many opportunities to develop their teaching skills in mathematics.
- Arising out of the recommendations of the previous inspection report, we agreed that we would look at how you have designed the curriculum to enable teachers to challenge the most able pupils. Pupils' topic and science work show that there is coverage of the new national curriculum. In lessons, teachers effectively question individual pupils to challenge their thinking. However, the results of this are not always apparent in their topic or science work. Leaders have identified that the next step to improve the curriculum is to define the expectations for each subject in terms of the skills that pupils need to acquire by the end of each year. At present, these are not clear and the work in some topic books shows that some of the most able pupils do similar work to other pupils.
- You have also adjusted the curriculum to provide wider opportunities since the previous inspection. You have made sure that your 'enterprise week' has

continued and have further enriched the curriculum through adding horse riding, fencing and archery to a growing list of activities, both within curriculum time and as part of your extra-curricular offer. You have provided opportunities to challenge pupils in different ways such as team-building or developing strategic thinking skills. Pupils speak highly of the diverse opportunities that they are given. The school is raising pupils' aspirations. Evidence of this can be seen in the sporting success of some of its pupils.

- Finally, I reviewed how leaders were promoting the importance of good attendance with pupils. You focus on developing parents' awareness of how holidays taken in term time affect their children's education. At curriculum information evenings you instil the message that absence relates to pupils' lost learning in practical terms. This is also reinforced at parents' evenings and by sending letters home to parents. In line with guidance from the Department for Education, holidays are no longer authorised. Parents are very supportive of the school and have responded well. This has reduced the amount of unnecessary absence in the school. Governors have been active in reviewing these actions, which have improved attendance to be in line with the national average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leaders' monitoring of teaching and learning provides more incisive feedback for teachers on how to improve their skills
- there are further opportunities for staff to develop their teaching practice in mathematics
- assessment in mathematics is more accurate across all year groups
- the school's curriculum continues to develop by defining the skills and content of each subject to ensure further challenge for pupils across the curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Bentham
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- I met with leaders and governors to discuss safeguarding and aspects of school leadership and management.
- I visited all classes along with you and spoke to pupils informally during lessons

about their work.

- I reviewed documentation about safeguarding, including the school's record of checks undertaken on newly appointed staff.
- I discussed a range of topics about school provision with pupils, both formally and informally.
- I watched pupils at playtime and reviewed arrangements for safeguarding.
- I conducted a scrutiny of pupils' books in mathematics, science and topic books.
- I heard pupils read.
- I reviewed documentation, which included the monitoring of teaching and learning, governors' minutes, the school's evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses and the school's development plan.
- I considered the 31 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.