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Mrs Lindsey Vollans
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Dear Mrs Vollans

Short inspection of Evenwood CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 June 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 October 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 brought a renewed impetus to the school to address the weaker areas of performance since your arrival in January 2018. Governors, working together with the local authority and diocese, were able to quickly broker your leadership. This ensured continuity of leadership, following the previous headteacher's departure from the school. You have wasted no time in making changes within the school. Staff have responded quickly to become new leaders, not only teachers. You have provided them with opportunities to work alongside colleagues from St Michael's CofE School, where you are also the headteacher, and the beginnings of a strong, mutual learning partnership are developing. You recognise that one of Evenwood's strengths is the high quality of pastoral support and how effective staff are at nurturing pupils. The school's mission, based on Christian values, is 'to develop a motivated passion for learning that will enable each child to be the best they can be'. This statement is as true for staff as it is for pupils.

At the last inspection, leaders were asked to review the school's procedures for the teaching of phonics so that younger pupils became more confident readers. In recent years, the above average proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check indicates that, indeed, early reading gets off to a good start. However, in the last couple of years, standards in reading by the end of Year 2 have been below average. Leaders have now taken swift

action to raise standards in reading by the end of Year 2. High-quality staff training and support from experienced practitioners is paying off. Opportunities for pupils to apply their phonics knowledge, both in the early years and in key stage 1, have been extended. Even so, making sure that pupils reach the expected standard in reading at the end of Year 2 remains an important next step.

Leaders were also asked to improve the accuracy of pupils' spelling at the last inspection. Leaders make sure that accuracy in spelling is a high priority, both at school and at home. Standards in spelling by the end of key stage 2 have improved. You and your leaders know, however, that there is still more work to do to improve pupils' achievement in writing throughout the school.

Pupils and parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Parents said that the school is for the community and that staff are always approachable, with relationships between the school being open and honest. The weekly celebration assembly provides a chance for parents to see learning in action and, as a result, parents are more able to support their children's learning at home. The excellent standard of pupils' behaviour noted at the time of the last inspection has been maintained. Pupils are extremely polite and friendly and talk openly about how communication and teamwork are as important in class as they are in the playground. They enjoy learning from their peers and thinking about what their next steps might be. Pupils were keen to talk about their new climbing frame. Its bespoke design incorporates parts of all their class castle names, and they hope to use this not only for play but also within their learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team ensures that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that training for staff and governors is up to date. The strong relationships between parents and school result in support being accessed in a timely manner so that families receive the most appropriate help as quickly as possible. The parent support adviser works tirelessly with families and a range of different agencies to support and protect children. Record-keeping is detailed and staff are very quick at noticing and reporting any subtle changes in pupils' behaviour or mood that they observe. The safeguarding team is then prompt in assessing these changes and exploring the potential reasons, making referrals to the local authority where necessary. Leaders are determined to support parents every step of the way, ensuring that they access the most suitable service on offer.

Governors use their skills and knowledge to support the school's safeguarding work extremely well. They, along with the safeguarding team, disseminate their training to others to ensure that safeguarding has a high profile in school. Pupils say that bullying is rare and that they feel safe at school. Pupils trust adults to deal with anything that does happen and they say that this is done quickly and with minimal fuss.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on several key lines of enquiry. As the leadership of the school had changed recently, the first of these looked at whether leaders have a good grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses so that effective plans are in place to improve the school. Since your appointment, you have completed a robust evaluation of the school's effectiveness that links closely to the school improvement plan. This plan sets out clear actions, timescales and milestones so that the actions taken can be evaluated effectively. You have taken swift action to address weaknesses in outcomes in the early years and key stage 1. Classes have been sensibly regrouped to improve lines of accountability. New performance management objectives have been set for teachers. This has resulted in teachers focusing more on developing high-quality teaching. The partnership with your other school, St Michael's CofE Primary School, is proving highly effective. Both schools are benefiting from this arrangement and support is now in place to develop middle and senior leaders so that they can contribute more effectively to school improvement activities. As a result, new leadership roles have been created in the early years and for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Staff feel empowered by you to 'pinch with pride' good ideas from other schools and to personalise them to work at Evenwood Primary School.
- I also focused on whether children are making a good start to learning in the early years and in key stage 1. This is because, in recent years, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of Reception and the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standards by the end of Year 2 have been below average, especially in reading and writing.
- The skills and abilities of children in this small school vary considerably when they start school. However, most arrive with skills that are lower than those typical for their age. Occasionally, their skills are much lower. A new early years unit was formed in February 2018, with Nursery- and Reception-aged children taught together. This has had a very positive impact on improving the quality of early years provision. A new early years leader is in post and has taken on this role with renewed energy and a keen drive for improvement. Improvements are already clearly evident. The progression between the Nursery and Reception Year, for example, has been strengthened. The outdoor space has been improved so that it is an age-appropriate environment. Newly developed outdoor reading and writing areas, for example, effectively encourage children to use vocabulary consistent with early years expectations. Inspection evidence and the school's own information, showing the achievements of children currently in the early years, indicate that children's progress has improved and that they are now making good progress from their starting points. The proportion of children on track to achieve a good level of development this year has risen considerably as a result.
- In the past, although an above-average proportion of pupils have reached the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check, this good achievement has not been reflected in the reported teacher assessments of pupils' standards in reading, or in writing, at the end of Year 2. Leaders have acknowledged that

pupils have struggled to apply their phonics skills to develop their reading. For some pupils, their reading comprehension, inference and deduction skills have not developed effectively. However, actions to address this are already underway. Standards in reading are rising as a result. Further work is needed, however, to ensure that these actions are reflected in the standards achieved in reading by the end of Year 2.

- Standards in writing by the end of Year 2 have also been too low in recent years. Leaders have also already taken action to address this. Work in current pupils' books, for example, shows an improvement in pupils' writing stamina. The quality of handwriting is higher. Expectations of what pupils can and should achieve have been raised. Pupils are also now given more opportunities to write, including at length. However, you and your leaders know that you need to check carefully that pupils are given good opportunities to develop their writing skills when they undertake work across the various curriculum subjects. This is an important next step, both in both key stage 1 and for pupils as they move through key stage 2.
- Published school information indicated that a much higher than average proportion of pupils attending the school were identified as having SEN and/or disabilities. I wanted to establish why this is the case and to check whether these pupils are making good progress. A new special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has been appointed and she has made a good start. She is well supported by local authority training and by her counterpart at St Michael's CofE Primary. The school's approach to assessing pupils' additional needs has been revised and strengthened. Staff training has improved understanding of how to identify pupils who have SEN. The number of pupils on the school's register for SEN has reduced markedly. Programmes of support have been revised to ensure that they better meet pupils' individual needs. Your SENCo leader is very determined to access the specialist support that pupils need. Partnerships with a number of external agencies that offer support are strong. Plans to support current pupils are firmly in place. Pupils are making good progress as a result.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers develop pupils' reading comprehension, inference and deduction skills effectively so that at least an average proportion of pupils achieve the expected standard in reading by the end of Year 2
- across the school, pupils are provided with more opportunities to develop their writing skills when they undertake work across the various curriculum subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Clennan
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I observed teaching and learning and scrutinised examples of pupils' work. I met with you, senior leaders, the parent support adviser and the deputy headteacher from St Michael's CofE Primary School. I met with three governors and spoke to a representative of the local authority. I spoke with 12 pupils in key stage 2 and with pupils informally in lessons and around the school. I also listened to several pupils read.

I evaluated the 14 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and met with a group of parents. I also took account of the 10 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. I reviewed a range of school documents. These included: the school's self-evaluation; the school's development plans; and safeguarding documentation. I also considered information posted on the school's website.