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Mr David Hodgkiss
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hodgkiss

Short inspection of Rockcliffe CofE School

Following my visit to the school on 2 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 May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You provide strong and caring leadership. Along with your governors, you have set a clear vision of where you want to take the school. You work tirelessly to support staff development to benefit pupils. As a result, many of your staff go on to new promotions elsewhere. This has resulted in some instability in staffing recently. However, you are not afraid to challenge underperformance and to make difficult decisions. Senior leaders have incisively reorganised teaching so that teachers are in classes to best suit their abilities and meet the needs of their pupils.

You and your team have taken action to address the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. Pupils' attainment has risen and is now above that seen nationally in mathematics. Leaders' focus on basic skills in mathematics has led to an improvement in pupils' understanding. Pupils make good progress in written calculations across the school. They apply this knowledge when solving word problems of increasing complexity. However, pupils are given fewer opportunities to investigate numbers and number patterns. This limits the opportunities for pupils to work at greater depth or to attain higher standards. In writing, pupils make good progress with spelling and grammar. Younger pupils use their knowledge of letter sounds to help them to spell. This progress is as a result of your teachers' good subject knowledge. However, you acknowledge that too few pupils are reaching the

higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 1 and key stage 2. You recognise that poor presentation and handwriting let some pupils down.

The appointment of a temporary assistant headteacher, with responsibility for teaching and learning, has further strengthened the way in which teachers work together and share their ideas and expertise. As a result, there is a consistent approach, particularly in the teaching of English.

Governors have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They challenge leaders to ensure that improvements are made. They understand the school's strengths and areas for development and have ensured that their own development has kept pace with change.

This is a caring school where pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is developed well through the school's faith characteristics. Pupils demonstrate high levels of respect for one another and behave well around school. They are polite and courteous, hold doors open and support one another in class and at playtime. Pupils sometimes lose concentration in lessons due to differences in teachers' expectations of the way in which pupils should behave. You are aware of this and are taking steps to improve it. Pupils have a good understanding of other faiths and cultures in Britain and the wider world. British values are promoted consistently and pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain.

Parents are very supportive. They say that their children are happy and one parent told me that his daughter 'dances' into school every day. Parents value the clear communication that they receive and say that you and your staff are very approachable.

Safeguarding is effective.

The strong culture of safeguarding is evident across every aspect of the school's work. You and your staff know each pupil well, and provide good support and guidance. Pupils say that they feel happy and safe in school and that they are confident that staff will deal with any problems that they may have. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including while online, due to the good teaching and guidance that they receive. For example, pupils referred to the information that they have received about age guidance for social media and electronic games. Parents, too, speak positively about how well their children are looked after and the care that they receive.

Although the current policy does not reflect this, training for staff is up to date, and additional information on the school's website includes the most recent government guidance on safeguarding. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality.

Inspection findings

- Pupils benefit from good teaching and your assistant headteacher provides an excellent role model for this. There are still, however, further opportunities for teachers to help all pupils to make more rapid progress by thinking carefully about how they plan and deliver their lessons. For these reasons, you are constantly checking the quality of teaching and responding to your findings with appropriate support and training. When teaching quality is on occasion weaker, you take robust action to address this.
- Your staff know the pupils well. As a result, pupils' progress is tracked and monitored carefully. Swift interventions are put in place for those pupils who are at risk of falling behind.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school. One parent said that his son is 'disappointed when it's the weekend'. As a result, pupils attend regularly. Leaders take firm action when attendance dips, including sending text messages and letters and arranging meetings with parents. You stress the need to attend school regularly and use rewards to encourage this. Your saying, 'You've got to be in to win', is understood by pupils.
- A key line of enquiry for this inspection was about the progress that pupils make in reading. Currently, pupils are making better progress than in 2016. Lower-attaining and middle-ability pupils make good progress in reading. Pupils can find information in the text and are increasingly able to work things out from what characters say and do. They use what they have read to support their answers.
- Pupils in key stage 1 read regularly. Lower-attaining pupils use their knowledge of letter sounds to support their reading. The most able read fluently and with expression. They are able to talk about characters and how their actions affect the plot of a story. This improvement is as a result of the clear focus of the subject leader on a consistent approach across school. Consequently, pupils are beginning to build systematically on previous learning.
- Teachers use the new resources well, including the new reading books, which have been selected to appeal to a wide range of pupils. Books have been carefully chosen to appeal to boys and include a range of non-fiction as well as fiction books.
- The most able pupils are developing a deeper understanding of what they read. This is due to leaders' recent focus on improving pupils' comprehension skills. However, the new approach has not had time to fully embed and you acknowledge that too few pupils are working at the higher standards in reading.
- Another line of enquiry was focused on the progress that boys make in writing. From a joint review of writing, we found that lower- and middle-attaining pupils, including boys, make good progress from their starting points. Lower-attaining pupils, including boys, make particularly good progress in key stage 1 to reach the standards expected for their age. They use a growing range of correct spellings and use their knowledge of letter sounds to have a go at other words.

They have a growing understanding of the features of different types of writing, for example how letters are structured.

- Across the school, some of the most able pupils are beginning to write with flair. For example, one pupil in Year 4 wrote: 'There stood a solitary eagle in the scorching sun.' However, there are few opportunities to write at length in history and science so that pupils can apply their skills. The quality of handwriting and presentation across the school is inconsistent. As well as suggesting a lack of pride, this will prevent pupils from reaching the higher standards.
- I also looked at how much progress boys make in the Nursery and Reception classes. Teachers take the interests of boys into account when they are planning activities. For example, some of the boys in the current Reception class are very interested in building things. As a result, teachers have included work about carpenters and builders in their current topic.
- Leaders' clear focus on writing has had a positive impact. There are opportunities to write in all areas of learning indoors, and children mark-make and write with a variety of large equipment outside. Adults encourage boys to draw plans and write when playing with large and small construction toys.
- Boys in the Reception class are keen to write and are proud of their achievements. For example, children were writing about their favourite book. They wrote simple sentences and used their letter knowledge to help them to spell. Two of the boys came to show me their work, talking excitedly about what they had written. As a result of teachers' careful planning and monitoring, boys in the Nursery and Reception classes are making good progress from their starting points.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- a greater proportion of pupils reach the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - giving pupils additional opportunities to apply their writing skills in history and science
 - encouraging pupils to investigate numbers
 - ensuring a consistent approach to reading across school
- pupils' handwriting and presentation are improved so that they are of a consistently good quality across school.

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

Yours sincerely

Tanya Hughes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection, I met with you, members of your leadership team, teachers and governors. I spoke with a representative of the local authority. You, your assistant headteacher and I visited classes to observe learning and looked at work in pupils' books. I met with pupils throughout the day and spoke with six parents in the playground before school. I considered the 37 responses and the 35 'freetext' comments made by parents on the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View. I heard several pupils read and observed pupils in the playground and in the dining hall.

I conducted a detailed review of safeguarding, including checking on the school's policies, procedures and record-keeping. I talked with you, other staff and governors about how the school ensures that children are kept safe. I also considered a range of other documentation, including school improvement planning and information about pupils' progress and attainment.