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Mrs Julia Dalglish
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Dalglish

Short inspection of Lees Hill CofE School

Following my visit to the school on 3 March 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 July 2011.

This school continues to be good.

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

In the short time you have been in post you have won the trust and support of governors, staff, pupils and parents. Governors have a more visible presence around school, the quality of teaching is improving, pupils are happier and the parents are unanimous in their confidence in you. You have effectively steered the school through a period of change and have built on its strengths.

You have quickly secured an accurate view of the school and have worked well with governors to plan what needs to be done. You have put in place well-considered actions to tackle areas of weakness and these are already having a positive impact, for example the system you have introduced to assess pupils' progress. Everyone has benefited from the links with other schools, including a teaching school, and the local authority. Support from these partners has accelerated the pace of change.

Pupils are thriving in the happy, vibrant learning community you have developed. They enjoy their role as school councillors, are looking forward to their residential trip with pupils from another school and find their learning fun.

Parents appreciate the efforts you and your teachers have made to get to know them. They find you and your staff friendly and approachable. They have noticed that their children are more confident, happier and making better progress in school since the beginning of the year.

Pupils join your school eager to learn. They make good progress across the early years and, as a result, for the past three years all children have achieved a good level of development. Pupils build on this firm foundation, meeting the expected standard in phonics at the end of Year 1. All pupils leave Key Stage 1 with skills and knowledge at least in line with national averages in reading, writing and mathematics.

Your pupils make steady progress across Key Stage 2, achieving in line with their peers nationally at the end of Year 6. The very small numbers of pupils who are disadvantaged or who have special educational needs or disability achieve in line with their peers. However, too few pupils across school achieve the higher levels of which they are capable, particularly in mathematics and writing.

You have swiftly tackled the first area for improvement from the last inspection. Teachers' carefully considered written feedback to pupils clearly sets out what they need to do to improve their work. Pupils told the inspector that they find the time they are given to read and respond to their teachers' marking useful.

During the inspection we discussed the second area for improvement: to provide pupils with greater opportunities to be more independent in their learning. This area has not yet been addressed but you have already identified this in your school improvement plan and understand how this will help pupils achieve the higher standards of which they are capable.

You are all quite rightly proud of your school. One parent described Lees Hill as 'a little gem'. You, your staff and governors are committed and hard-working. You provide pupils with a wealth of experiences, including visits to places of worship, museums and sporting events. You are well supported by parents, who make sure their children attend regularly, complete their homework on time, raise funds for school and support school events.

Safeguarding is effective.

On appointment you prioritised the review of safeguarding arrangements and took action to make sure your policy and procedures are fit for purpose. As a result, staff are aware of the latest guidance and have received relevant training to ensure the continuing safety of pupils. Procedures are in place to check the suitability of staff and volunteers working with pupils. Staff make sure that pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including while online. Pupils feel safe and well-cared-for in school. Pupils trust the adults who work with them and feel confident to talk to them if they are worried or upset. Pupils say that bullying and bad behaviour is extremely rare and that any occurrences are swiftly and effectively dealt with by staff.

Inspection findings

- You were initially seconded to Lees Hill for one term starting in September 2015. Following the resignation of the substantive headteacher, it has been agreed that you will remain in post for the rest of the academic year. One of the teachers also left at the end of the summer term. The other teacher is

currently on maternity leave. These two posts are covered by newly qualified teachers.

- Since your appointment, you have brought Lees Hill to life. Your energy and enthusiasm are infectious. Staff, governors, pupils and parents are delighted with the changes you have made. Everyone feels welcome in school and appreciates the time you make to listen to them.
- You have quickly built a hard-working and committed team who share your vision for the school. You lead by example which has earned you the respect of your colleagues. You set high expectations for staff and governors and are ambitious for pupils. You have ensured governors are able to provide more effective support and challenge, supported your teaching staff to help all their pupils learn well and paid heed to the views of parents.
- You have called on the expertise of a teaching school and the local authority to ensure you have a deep, accurate understanding of the school's effectiveness. You have prioritised those aspects for improvement which are most pressing and everyone can see the positive difference you are making.
- You have used your professional judgment to good effect in supporting your teaching staff. You have put in place training tailored to their individual needs. As a result, the quality of teaching is improving in both your classes. Moreover, pupils and parents recognise the improvements in pupils' progress this academic year and this view is supported by the work in their books.
- Parents and pupils are concerned about the small numbers of pupils, not only posing a potential threat to the future of the school but also limiting their children's opportunities to establish a group of friends of the same age, interests or gender. You are successfully addressing this through the shared learning opportunities you are organising with local schools. The pupils have enjoyed getting to know neighbouring pupils and are looking forward to their shared residential trip.
- Governors are also grasping the nettle regarding the concerns around small numbers of pupils in school. They recognise the urgency of appointing a permanent headteacher to ensure that the school moves from strength to strength and their plans for this are well advanced. Governors know the importance of securing the future of the school through increasing the number of pupils on roll. They are sensibly taking advice from a school which successfully overcame similar challenges. Governors are resolute in their determination that Lees Hill will serve its community for many years to come.
- You have worked well with your governing body to ensure that they are able to provide more effective support and challenge. Together you are shaping the direction of the school and tackling those areas in need of improvement. As I discussed with governors, there is still much to do to make certain they fulfil all their statutory responsibilities, including making sure that the school's website contains all the required detail to meet requirements. Your governors recognise the Chair's drive and ambition which have brought a new wave of optimism into the group. Governors have recognised the need for an audit of their work. This review is crucial if you are going to achieve your ambitions for Lees Hill.

- Your pupils are polite and courteous. They wear their uniform with pride. They describe Lees Hill as 'one big family'. They look after each other, show respect to the adults in school and try their best in class. Your staff work hard to help the youngest children settle in well when they start school. Every morning your pupils receive a warm welcome from their teachers.
- Your pupils make a real contribution to their community. They took part in a 'Make a Difference' event doing everything from litter-picking to making their mother a cup of tea. They are keen to help those less fortunate than themselves, for example by fundraising for Lawrence's Roundabout Well Appeal as part of their link with Tanzania through a local secondary school. You also extend an invitation to the community to come for lunch once a month.
- During the inspection, we discussed our shared view that more pupils are capable of achieving the higher levels. We looked at pupils' books, observed teaching and I talked to a group of pupils about their learning. We agreed that teachers need to move most-able pupils' learning on quickly so that they do not waste any time rehearsing what they already know. Particularly in mathematics, teachers need to give those pupils who are 'quick graspers' tasks which deepen their understanding. You have also already identified that pupils should be given more time to work things out for themselves and encouraged to think more for themselves, seeing making mistakes as part of the learning process.
- You have drawn on your expertise in early years to improve the provision for your youngest children. You have reorganised the classroom, purchased some essential resources and worked alongside the staff to make certain the children get off to a good start. As we discussed, children's free access to the full range of learning experiences is somewhat constrained as there are not enough staff available all of the time to supervise the children both indoors and outdoors. It is important that a resolution to this is found as soon as possible.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- more pupils across the school achieve the higher standards of which they are capable, by teachers setting work which challenges pupils, requires them to work things out for themselves and raises their expectations of what they are capable of
- the governing body has effective systems in place to check that the school's website, including policies, is up to date and fully meets requirements
- governors continue to strengthen their role as strategic leaders so that they provide effective support and challenge which directly impacts on school improvement.

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 County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Pippa Jackson Maitland
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I spoke to you, members of the governing body, a group of four staff and a group of six pupils. I also spoke with a representative from the local authority and the Rural Learning Alliance Teaching School. Together, we made short visits to lessons during which I spoke to pupils and looked at the quality of their work. I spoke to one parent at the end of the school day and took account of a letter sent to me by another parent. I also considered the views of 14 pupils, 10 parents and five staff who completed online questionnaires. I reviewed your self-evaluation, as well as a range of other documentation. I also checked the effectiveness of your safeguarding arrangements and recruitment information.