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5 March 2019

Mrs Michaela Carney
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Dear Mrs Carney

Short inspection of Skelton Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 20 February 2019, 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 February 2015.

This school continues to be good.

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

The improvements you have made to the school since your appointment as interim headteacher in September are evident in everything I heard and saw in school. You have a clear vision of the journey on which you want to take the school. Staff are fully aware of this vision and are united in their determination to play their part in realising it.

You have carried out thorough self-evaluation to identify strengths and areas for development. You have taken swift action to address any aspects of the school that were less than good and have detailed plans in place to continue this improvement.

Staff say that they are proud to work at the school. They value the increased opportunities for professional development that you have provided and say that they are given the right amount of encouragement, challenge and support. You have created a climate in which staff are trusted to take risks and innovate in ways that are right for the pupils.

Pupils speak with enthusiasm about the many opportunities that school life has to offer. They like the range of different subjects and enjoy being able to go on educational outings and attend a variety of different after-school clubs. The

curriculum offers breadth; however, there is scope to develop it further to deepen understanding, build subject-specific skills and broaden pupils' vocabulary.

Parents and carers speak very highly of the school. They say that you and other staff are very approachable and know individual pupils well. They say their children are happy and enjoy school. One parent summed up their thoughts by saying, 'Everyone in school works incredibly hard to ensure that the children are able to reach their potential in a fun and caring environment.'

Governors are extremely supportive of the changes you have made since your appointment. They believe that you have the ambition, enthusiasm and skills to lead the school on a continuous journey of improvement. They say that you help them to gain a strategic view about the work of the school through your detailed information reports. They also make visits to school and analyse assessment information. Governing body minutes show that they provide you with challenge and expect you to justify your actions.

Following the last inspection, leaders were asked to provide further training for all teachers, especially those new to the school, to ensure that they have the mathematical subject knowledge to extend pupils' skills to solve problems. Staff now demonstrate a good subject knowledge and have improved pupils' ability and confidence in solving problems. However, there is still further work to do to ensure that pupils are given the right level of challenge.

Leaders were also asked to embed the new system of teaching phonics. Staff are well trained and deliver phonics effectively with confidence. Pupils enjoy and respond well to the routines offered in these sessions and are developing the skills needed to read and write accurately.

The final area for improvement asked leaders to offer more support to the few pupils who needed further encouragement to behave and become successful learners. This small group of pupils are given bespoke help to self-regulate their behaviour and to focus on learning. Staff say that leaders support them well in managing pupils' behaviour and that the training they have received to help pupils develop more positive attitudes has been really useful. The number of fixed-term exclusions has reduced. Pupils, parents and staff say that overall behaviour has dramatically improved over this academic year.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your team ensure that all policies and procedures are fit for purpose. Thorough checks are undertaken to ensure that all staff are safe to work with children. Records are well organised and clear. Staff are vigilant and report all concerns, no matter how small they seem. When appropriate, actions are taken in a timely manner.

Records show that you regularly provide staff with safeguarding training and updates. This ensures that they are aware of and can apply the latest guidance and

thinking in their daily work. You have made sure that staff are aware of risks that are specific to your locality.

Parents say that their children are well looked after and feel safe in school. They report that the school responds well to any concerns they raise and deals effectively with rare incidents of bullying. One parent wrote, 'The school provides a warm, secure and nurturing environment.'

Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They told me that teachers are good at resolving rare incidents of bullying and that there are adults in school that they can talk to if something is worrying them. Pupils could talk knowledgeably about work they have done relating to road safety and using the internet.

Inspection findings

- Pupils in the early years and key stage 1 use their phonics skills well in their reading and writing. Staff display a thorough grasp of the subject and make good use of lesson time. Pupils are fully engaged in their learning and are continually building up their skills in breaking down words and blending them back together to read them. Staff insist that pupils form letters correctly. Pupils are very quickly expected to write independently, making phonetically plausible choices in their spelling. The decision you made in September to use different books for writing has given pupils opportunities to write at length and make good progress.
- In mathematics, pupils have opportunities to develop fluency, reasoning and problem-solving skills. You have ensured that there is a strong focus on allowing pupils to investigate and explore. Pupils are encouraged to use apparatus and diagrams to represent their work before they move on to more abstract methods. This approach has resulted in pupils having a more thorough understanding of different concepts and an ability to link different aspects of mathematics together. However, the learning activities provided do not offer consistently high challenge to test their thinking.
- Leaders ensure that the school's work to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is effective. There is a strong focus on quickly identifying needs and removing barriers to learning. Staff have recently been given training to give them more skills to help the pupils with whom they work. The support given to pupils is well matched to their needs. As a result, pupils are making good progress.
- The school has a broad and balanced curriculum. Pupils have opportunities to learn about a wide range of topics, often in innovative and exciting ways. For example, visiting Snozone to get first-hand experience during a topic on polar regions. Pupils have lots of opportunities to apply and practise their English and mathematics skills in a range of different subjects. However, they do not always have enough opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding of a wide range of vocabulary. Nor are pupils able to build up subject-specific skills and understanding over time in subjects other than English and mathematics. There is further work for middle leaders to do in planning and evaluating the curriculum to ensure that pupils build up secure skills and knowledge over time.

- You have put a range of effective strategies in place to improve attendance. The class with the highest attendance each week is applauded in assembly and pupils with 100% attendance are given a certificate each term. In some cases, meetings are held with parents to discuss ways to improve their child's attendance. Leaders have also taken a firm line in respect of term-time holidays. As a result, attendance has improved.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- middle leaders exert more influence in developing and evaluating the curriculum to make sure that pupils build up skills and knowledge in a range of subjects securely over time
- teaching extends pupils' knowledge and understanding of vocabulary
- learning activities in mathematics provide consistently high challenge so that pupils have frequent opportunities to apply their understanding.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Cook
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I made visits to all classes with you and looked at work in pupils' books. I met with the SEND leader, a group of governors, a representative from the local authority and a representative from the Hope Trust.

I talked with several parents as they dropped their children off at the start of the school day and took account of the 40 responses from parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. I talked informally with pupils in lessons, met formally with a group of pupils, and took account of the 16 responses to the Ofsted pupil survey. I met with a group of staff and took account of the 13 responses to the Ofsted staff survey.

I scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation document, the school improvement plan, minutes of governing body meetings, school assessment information, and attendance and safeguarding documentation.