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Miss Bernadette Calvey
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Calvey

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Vicarage Park CE Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 25 May 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, other senior leaders, teachers, the chair and the vice chair of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and a representative of the diocese to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated your action plans and reviewed various documents, including curriculum plans, records of monitoring that you have undertaken and records of support from school leaders who work with you. I considered information about the progress being made by pupils and reviewed some of their exercise books. I made brief visits to most classes and spoke informally with pupils about their work. I read information on the school's website.

Context

Since the last inspection, one new part-time teacher has joined the staff. Three additional governors have been co-opted. There has been no change to the number of pupils on the school's roll.

Main findings

You have continued the work that you had begun prior to the last inspection to improve the curriculum, develop teaching and learning and create a more outward-facing school. Improvement is evident and your contribution as headteacher is significant and greatly valued by staff and governors. Your evaluation of the school is accurate and honest; it is based on a range of activities, including scrutiny of teachers' planning, lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work and analysis of performance data. You have listened carefully to the views of parents and pupils to ensure that your actions are well judged. The pupils with whom I spoke during my visit were keen to tell me about their academic work and their broader activities in school, such as raising money for Action Aid through their well-supported cake sale and their success in a local lacrosse tournament. You have maintained the school's pastoral strength and distinctive ethos while ensuring that there is a rigorous drive to inject challenge and raise standards.

The senior leadership team was relatively new at the time of the previous inspection. It is now well established and its members are working coherently to ensure that whole-school priorities are realised at class level. Senior leaders are passionate about making a difference to the school's effectiveness. They are knowledgeable and committed, and also very willing to receive support and share ideas. The leaders for mathematics and English are driving forward rigorous programmes to improve teachers' subject knowledge and ensure that basic skills are taught well. The leaders of science are well equipped to evaluate the quality of provision in their subject. Checks on other subjects are at an earlier stage of development.

The early years leader has a clear plan for improvement and has made several carefully considered changes, including some reorganisation of activities at different levels to meet children's needs. She has identified that the writing skills of children currently in the Reception Year are not as strong as their other skills, and so she has found contexts for writing that will engage children, such as writing plans for junk models they will construct.

There is some variability in the quality of teaching. Much teaching is well paced and based on teachers' secure subject knowledge, but some does not move pupils' understanding on at sufficient pace. You are fully aware of individual teachers' strengths and the areas in which they need to improve, and you are providing support to plug gaps in teachers' knowledge. Your staff feel that more is demanded of them than previously, but that they also have clear direction and their work is

valued. Equally, pupils feel that more is demanded of them, but that the revised curriculum provides enjoyable experiences.

Teachers' planning has improved and is clearly guided by their understanding of what pupils need to do next to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding. Teachers have considered national age-related expectations and raised the level of challenge for pupils to meet the increased demands of the new national curriculum. Pupils who have special education needs or disability receive good support and take an active part in the life of this very inclusive school. Teaching assistants have benefited from additional training. The system of tracking pupils' progress has been rationalised by the acting deputy headteacher, who also fulfils the role of special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) effectively.

Added challenge is evident in pupils' work. For example, there has been a key focus in mathematics on deepening pupils' understanding, improving their mathematical fluency and providing them with interesting contexts for problem solving. Pupils in Year 6 have enjoyed presenting their responses to mathematical problems such as 'How long would it take to drive across the USA in your dad's car?' This problem required them to identify the factors and calculations that they would need to consider. They investigated distance, driving speed regulations in different states and thought about details such as how much time would be needed for breaks. Pupils prided themselves on their work and understood the need to justify their conclusions. Teachers regularly expect pupils to explain their thinking by asking them to 'prove it to me.' The school works with a local mathematics teaching hub; this cooperation is proving beneficial as it enables teachers to discuss their approaches. Using funds raised by your active parent teachers' association, the school has purchased mathematical packs for each child to take home, including games and resources to help family learning.

In English, there has been a focus on improving pupils' basic spelling, punctuation and grammar skills through careful planning, investment in new resources, and more specific feedback to pupils. Teachers often identify errors in pupils' work and pupils correct these on a more regular basis. There are some good examples of pupils' writing celebrated in classrooms, including in Year 4, where pupils' endings to the story of 'Fox' by Margaret Wild are beautifully presented and illustrated. However, relatively little pupils' writing is displayed in some classrooms and this restricts pupils' opportunities to see good examples of how to structure their work. The school's work on reading has developed further, with investment in a new reading programme to extend the breadth and range of pupils' reading of challenging age-appropriate texts.

The senior leader with responsibility for the curriculum has worked with subject leaders to ensure that the school covers the content of the national curriculum and provides good opportunities for pupils to deepen their learning and develop their reasoning. There are now plentiful opportunities for pupils to participate in educational visits and to learn from visitors, with some notable impact. In Year 5,

pupils enjoyed exploring a planetarium and made their own representations of planets, work which has gained the interest of NASA scientists. Pupils in Year 1 have visited Kendal College to find out about the work of its animal rescue centre. These experiences make learning memorable and also present opportunities for pupils to understand key themes such as enterprise and community that are woven through the curriculum plan. You have ensured that British values are part of the work of all classes.

The school's approach to homework has enlivened learning; pupils enjoy the opportunity to work intensively on a topic at home and then present their ideas to their peers. 'Genius hour' in Year 3 enables pupils to conduct independent research that they direct for themselves. Year 2 pupils were excited during this inspection about their forthcoming 'Roald Dahl day' when their study of the author was about to culminate in a day of book-related activities conducted in the costumes of characters. Pupils are being challenged to achieve more than they did previously. There is a good work ethic in school. Pupils confidently talk to each other about their ideas and stay on task well, such as in Year 1 where they persevered to complete number sentences without over-reliance on an adult.

Governance has been strengthened. An external review of governance was completed by a national leader of governance and the governing body has acted on its findings. Three additional members have been co-opted onto the governing body. They are highly skilled and have been instrumental in supporting the implementation of the action plan. Governors have a clear view of the school's priorities and its work towards realising these. They have put plans in place to ensure that leadership arrangements are secure for the autumn term when you, the chair and the vice-chair of the governing body will all have left Vicarage Park.

The school has been through a period of considerable change. You have kept parents informed of these changes through meetings with a focus group. You have also improved the quality of information on the school's website so that parents now have a better understanding of what their children are going to learn, and what they have recently learned.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The school has received proportionate support that has been valued by you and the staff. The national leader of governance who reviewed the governors' work has continued to review the governing body's progress in implementing its action plan. Governors have benefited from additional training provided by the local authority and through the Kendal Collaborative Partnership. You received support from a local leader of education following the last inspection and are now working in partnership with another local leader to ensure effective transition in leadership. A specialist

leader in education has supported the acting deputy headteacher in developing effective practice as a special educational needs coordinator. The local authority adviser has also worked with you and the governors and has a good understanding of the school. Staff value the opportunities they now have for working in partnership with other schools, including through the local mathematics hub. Partnership arrangements enable the staff to share their good practice as well as learning about effective approaches from colleagues elsewhere. An adviser from the Diocese of Carlisle has been co-opted on to the governing body. The governing body is fully aware of the need to maintain external support for the school during the period in which major changes to its leadership take place.

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

Shirley Gornall
Her Majesty's Inspector