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Dear Mrs Harrison

Short inspection of Culgaith CofE School

Following my visit to the school on 6 October 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 April 2012.

This school continues to be good.

You and the wider leadership team have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Pupils who attend Culgaith CofE School flourish. Pupils are very happy and describe the school as 'one big family'. Pupils of all ages mix in the playground and neighbouring school woodland. They play, they look after each other and they have fun.

Strong personal development is at the heart of what this school tries to achieve for its pupils, and you accomplish this very successfully. Pupils leave Culgaith CofE School self-assured, well educated, articulate, creative, responsible and principled. As they progress through this school, pupils become very well prepared for their future.

You ensure that all associated with the school share your vision. There is a 'Culgaith philosophy', which flavours what teachers do in the classrooms. Teachers' aspirations are high and consistent across all classes. There is a strong emphasis on learning across subject boundaries, so literacy is developed throughout all activities. This is very evident in the pupils' religious education work. While learning about geography, pupils are deepening their understanding of mathematics. Pupils say that they love working in groups and pairs, solving problems and being creative.

An excellent governing body supports you very well. The governors are highly

professional, skilled and forward-thinking. Teamwork is effective across the whole school and you have developed leadership skills in all staff. They respond positively to your trust and support. They are eager to take on additional responsibilities. The school has responded well to considerable changes in the curriculum over recent years. Teaching of this new curriculum is firmly established. You are refining how best to assess the progress that children make and how to use this information to evaluate rigorously how well the school is performing.

From a very strong start in the early years, pupils make good progress across all subjects throughout the school. The teaching of reading is particularly effective. At the last inspection, mathematics was raised as an area for improvement. You have tackled this and now the teaching of mathematics is strong across the school. Teachers give a great deal of thought to how best to help individual pupils learn. Teachers implement these diverse strategies in lessons and beyond. They know how to motivate every pupil. Pupils' attendance is good and you have a clear understanding of the issues that sometimes affect individual pupils' attendance.

Safeguarding is effective.

You skilfully blend your highly professional approach to safeguarding with a passion to ensure that every child is safe and feels secure. This dedication to pupils' well-being is infectious and all adults in the school know how to keep children safe. You are supported expertly by the governor with responsibility for safeguarding. When working with other agencies, you are tenacious in ensuring that they fulfil their responsibilities promptly and professionally.

Your very caring approach to safeguarding is backed up with systematic procedures and thorough record keeping. Systems to ensure that only suitable staff are recruited are secure.

Learning how to stay safe is an integral part of the curriculum. When pupils are planning project work, they routinely assess potential risk and provide strategies to minimise it. Pupils care and look out for each other. Pupils talk easily with adults and have confidence in discussing any concerns they have about themselves or, indeed, any other pupil.

Inspection findings

- For this small school, with very small numbers of pupils in each year, annual published information on attainment and progress can show large swings in proportions of pupils appearing to be successful or otherwise. Moreover, the proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is much larger than average. Many of these pupils need considerable support to overcome severe barriers to their learning. Every child is seen as an individual, with unique talents and needs. Teachers are dedicated to meeting these needs and supporting every pupil to be the best they can be.
- Small year groups are combined to make viable classes. Teachers rise to the challenges this presents and maximise the benefits. Teachers work flexibly and adapt their approaches according to the composition of classes. They use their subject expertise to ensure that pupils, including any who may be

disadvantaged, learn well. Older children are very good 'pupil models' for younger ones, who replicate their good learning habits. The range of ages in a class, and consequently the wide range of pupils' starting points, requires teachers to provide activities that match a wide range of needs. They do this very skilfully. When a teacher believes that individual pupils have mastered an aspect of their work, the teacher will simply provide more challenging work or broaden their experience. In this way, the most able pupils are well served. Teachers also provide the most able pupils with a wide variety of challenging extra-curricular activities.

- Pupils learn to read very well. Children make a very good start in early years. Teachers and teaching assistants are highly skilled in building secure foundations to reading and writing through a systematic approach to teaching phonics. Pupils soon develop a love of reading. This is important in supporting other aspects of their learning.
- The teaching of mathematics is now very effective across the school. To improve pupils' skills in mental arithmetic and mathematical recall, teachers exploit pupils' competitive instincts. In Years 2 to 6, pupils take part in 'just a minute' with great enthusiasm. They try to beat their last score on how many quick questions they can get right. This rapidly improves their knowledge of tables and their confidence in doing simple calculations in their heads. Pupils apply their mathematical understanding to a wide variety of problem-solving activities in different contexts.
- Teachers encourage pupils' natural creativity and cultivate it. Benefits are apparent across pupils' learning, and particularly in their writing. Pupils write well because they have been taught well and they enjoy writing.
- Pupils benefit from a rich learning experience. They have numerous opportunities to learn indoors and outdoors. All subjects are taught well. After-school clubs are well attended and offer further opportunity to extend pupils' experiences. Additional sports and cultural activities support pupils' very strong personal development.
- Throughout the curriculum and enrichment activities, pupils make good progress and some aspects are outstanding. For example, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are particularly well supported. Their needs are quickly and accurately identified. The support and care these pupils receive is of the highest quality. For some, their starting points are low. No matter at what level they start, all make very strong progress.
- Pupils enjoy school and their attendance is good. Due to the very small numbers of pupils on roll, comparisons between the school's attendance rates and national rates are unreliable. You provide good support to pupils and their families in the event of any unavoidable absence.
- The governing body has provided you with excellent support for a significant period of time. It also holds you and other staff members to account for performance. The capacity of the governing body has been further enhanced with the development of the Penrith Hub for governors. This collaboration of five school governing bodies makes considerable expertise available to all hub schools.
- All the parents with whom I spoke and who responded to the online questionnaire are fully supportive of the work of the school. They appreciate

many aspects and particularly pick out the care, the knowledge teachers have of individuals and the fact that their children thoroughly enjoy school and are happy. All would recommend the school to others.

- You and your staff have invested much time in refining systems to monitor pupils' achievement as they progress. Currently, the targets set for pupils with different abilities are too similar, so that the most able pupils might have the same target as middle- or low-ability pupils. This restricts the opportunities for you and the governors to set and communicate the very highest academic objectives and to monitor pupils' progress closely.
- You are not complacent, always striving to improve the school. You look to the future and have long-term plans. You communicate your aspirations well to your staff and to governors. However, the impact these improvements are intended to have on pupils' achievements is not clear enough. This makes it difficult for you and school leaders to evaluate the effectiveness of improvements.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to develop the school's tracking system so that it better reflects the achievements of pupils
- individual pupil targets are challenging enough, particularly for the most able pupils
- evaluations of improvements and developments are measured, as far as possible, on the impact of what pupils can do, know and understand.

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

Neil Mackenzie
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Much inspection activity focused on how well pupils, including different groups, achieve across all subjects, how well pupils are protected from risks and how well pupils attend school.

I considered the breadth of pupils' experiences and the extent of their personal development.

In addition, I considered to what extent all levels of leadership have sufficient

capacity to improve the school further.

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, a group of pupils, five members of the governing body and one member of the Penrith Hub for governors. I met with a group of teachers. I spoke with a representative of the local authority. Documents were scrutinised, including safeguarding checks, pupil achievement tracking and records of checks on the quality of teaching. I also visited classrooms with you to speak to pupils, look at their books and observe their learning. I visited two after-school clubs. I examined child protection information. I spoke to six parents before the start of school and took account of 21 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View.