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Mr John Appleby
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Dear Mr Appleby

Short inspection of Easington CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 June 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 July 2015.

This school continues to be good.

Since your appointment, less than two years ago, and following a period of some turbulence, you have stabilised the school. Along with the recently appointed deputy headteacher, who has brought a fresh pair of eyes to matters, you have taken effective action to bring about much-needed improvement. Parents, carers, governors, staff and pupils all value your determination to make Easington CofE Primary School the best it can be.

Leaders have accurately identified strengths and weaknesses. They have put in place sharp plans that have begun to bear fruit. You regularly review progress against the identified priorities and communicate this to the governing body. You make increasingly regular checks on the quality of teaching. This generates helpful professional dialogue and is resulting in improvements to the quality of teaching.

Middle leadership in this small school is early in its development. You have begun to take positive steps to help middle leaders review the wider curriculum. Subjects such as history, geography and science need further development.

You have created a calm, orderly environment where pupils feel safe, develop positive attitudes to learning, and flourish. I found pupils to be polite, friendly and welcoming. They follow well-defined routines. They get along well together, and can be trusted to behave, often impeccably, with little direct supervision. Pupils are conscientious, get down to work quickly, and complete their tasks without interruption.

Pupils' achievement in reading is strong across the age range. The vast majority of pupils learn to read well by the time they leave the school. However, teachers do not keep a close enough eye on pupils' reading habits. Too many pupils, including the most able readers, do not develop a love of reading. They are not encouraged to read challenging literature. Weaker readers sometimes do not get enough practice reading at home.

At the last inspection, the inspector identified areas for improvement. One of these was to raise teachers' expectations of what the most able pupils ought to be able to achieve. Increasing numbers of pupils are beginning to achieve higher standards and greater depth in their learning. Another area for improvement was to improve pupils' outcomes in writing. A range of appropriate actions has resulted in improvements in the teaching of writing and improved outcomes. However, the quality of teaching of writing is not yet entirely consistent across the school.

Conscientious governors understand their roles and responsibilities. They have undertaken considerable training in their duties and subjected themselves to some external review. Over the last year or so, governors have increased their visits to the school. The governing body understands the key strengths and weaknesses and keeps an eye on pupils' progress. It draws on professional external validation of aspects of the school to assure itself about progress. The governing body offers appropriate challenge to leaders. It ensures that leaders properly carry out their safeguarding duties.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The record of the checks made on staff is meticulous. Leaders ensure that action is taken where concerns about the safety of pupils arise. Child protection records are detailed and show that leaders take comprehensive action. Staff are well trained in their safeguarding and child protection duties, including the 'Prevent' duty.

Pupils are confident that adults deal effectively with the very rare incidents of bullying. They say that adults listen to their views. They say that school is a friendly place where all are helped to join in. Pupils play safely together, for example taking turns on the climbing equipment. Adults teach pupils how to stay safe, including online, for example when playing online games.

Pupils learn about major world faiths and demonstrate open-minded attitudes to gender differences. The tolerance and respect they develop makes a strong contribution to their safety and prepares them well for life in modern Britain.

Inspection findings

- Last year, almost all Year 6 pupils achieved at least the expected standard in reading. An above-average proportion of pupils reached a high standard. By the

end of Year 1, over time, the percentage of pupils reaching the required standard in phonics has been above the national average, and all pupils have reached the standard by the end of Year 2. Most children in the early years make good progress in reading. However, in the early years, reading books are not accurately matched to children's developing phonic knowledge. In key stage 2, teachers do not monitor pupils' reading habits well enough. As a result, some of the less able readers do not get enough practice reading. Too many pupils, including the most able, do not develop a love of reading.

- Over the last few years, achievement in writing across the school has not been as strong as in reading and mathematics, including for the most able pupils. The teaching of writing is improving. Most teachers are adept at teaching grammar in a way that helps pupils to improve the quality of their written sentences. In the early years and in Year 1, pupils learn to build stamina in their writing. They write with increasing accuracy in spelling and punctuation. Handwriting is generally well developed across the school. Pupils have plenty of opportunities to practise and apply their knowledge and skills by writing at length in a range of subjects. However, the quality of teaching is not consistently effective in all year groups. As a result, some pupils, especially the most able, do not make the progress they should. This is mainly because not all teachers check carefully enough that pupils are doing their very best writing. For too many pupils in upper key stage 2, there are gaps in spelling knowledge because of ineffective teaching of spelling earlier in their schooling.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. Pupils acquire considerable knowledge in a wide range of subjects. Leaders ensure that pupils engage in a variety of enrichment and extra-curricular activities, such as visits to places of educational value and receiving visitors to school. However, the planning and the teaching of science, history and geography is too variable in quality. For example, some teaching in science is very effective, while some teachers make too much use of ineffective resources that do not stretch the most able pupils. Furthermore, leaders have not yet given sufficient thought to why particular content is taught at particular points or to the systematic sequencing of this content. This hampers pupils' progressive knowledge development.
- The very large majority of children enter the early years with knowledge, skills and understanding typical for their age. A minority enter below or above what is typical. Over time, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of the early years has increased. More children are beginning to exceed the early learning goals. The Reception classroom is a well-cared-for, inviting, engaging space, creatively organised and well resourced. Children are often absorbed and enthused in their play and exploration. Many activities children engage in independently challenge them because of the quality of the resources and the way these are arranged. I observed high-quality interactions between a teaching assistant and children. This helped the children to concentrate and to think carefully about their learning. High priority is given to writing across the areas of learning. Consequently, children make good progress in their writing. Children are helped to match letters to sounds effectively and to use this knowledge to work out unknown words when reading. Assessment is

systematic and regular. Many parents contribute to their children's assessment records.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- standards in writing continue to rise, especially for the most able pupils, by securing consistency in the quality of teaching of writing across the school
- the proportion of pupils reaching high standards and greater depth in their learning continues to increase by the end of each key stage, by ensuring that the most able pupils are consistently well challenged
- middle leaders are trained well to plan science, history, geography and other foundation subjects in a way that helps pupils to make more secure progress and reach high standards
- reading books for the youngest children are well matched to their developing phonic knowledge and that pupils across the school develop consistently positive reading habits.

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

Yours sincerely

Philip Riozzi
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Together, you and I observed teaching and learning in most classes. Along with the deputy headteacher, we scrutinised a range of pupils' workbooks. We continued a professional dialogue throughout the day. I met with several governors. I also met with a representative from the local authority and held a brief telephone conversation with a representative of the diocese. I observed children at play during their lunch hour and chatted informally with pupils. I met with a group of pupils to find out what it is like to be a pupil in the school. I listened to four pupils read. I took account of 37 responses to the online pupil survey. I considered the responses of 21 parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and six written responses from parents. I also examined the results of parent surveys carried out by the school. I considered the responses of 10 members of staff to the staff online survey. I scrutinised a range of documents, including minutes of governing body meetings, notes of visit from the local authority, the school self-evaluation document and school improvement plan. I examined safeguarding records and pupils' assessment information.