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Piccadilly Gate
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Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mrs Tracey Critchlow
Headteacher
Longhoughton Church of England Primary School
Lacey Street
Longhoughton
Alnwick
Northumberland
NE66 3AJ

Dear Mrs Critchlow

Short inspection of Longhoughton Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 13 December 2018, 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 March 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your passionate commitment to the school is evident. You know your pupils well and are clear about achieving the best for them and for the staff you lead. Leaders, including governors, are committed to, as your ethos statement says, 'creating and maintaining a positive, caring, safe environment where everyone can fulfil their true potential'.

Being situated near a Royal Air Force (RAF) base, the school has a high number of service children. Pupils find care, success and stability in the school, regardless of the length of time that they are with you. The service children that I spoke with during the inspection were positive about the welcome and care they receive when they join or return to the school. You have established excellent links with the RAF. The involvement of service personnel and families on the governing body as well as members of the local community offers balance and insight when considering the needs of the school.

Leaders are not complacent. You and the governors have an accurate view of the school's strengths and those areas where further work is needed. Your self-evaluation and improvement plan are clear and focused. Leaders have an excellent working relationship with both the local authority and the diocese, which enables you to effectively tackle the challenges that you face, especially where pupils' education is interrupted due to high levels of mobility.

Supported by your governors and the other schools in the Alnwick Partnership, you have worked to effectively move the school from a first school to a primary school. It will of course take time to fully embed the changes. In 2018 your first cohort of Year 6 pupils left the school.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to improve the teaching of, and pupils' progress in, mathematics. Published data shows that pupils' attainment in mathematics at key stage 1 has improved. However, at key stage 2 in 2018 the progress that pupils made in mathematics was well below the national average. You are aware of this and can explain in detail the various factors that contribute to this picture. Despite this, progress in mathematics at key stage 2 needs to improve.

Leaders are clear about the importance of good attendance at school. Pupils say that good attendance is celebrated and that they are supported with the work that they miss, if absent from school. Governors are aware of this and the local authority is supporting your work to ensure that pupils attend regularly. However, too many pupils are persistently absent, and continued action is needed to improve pupils' attendance.

Governors are proud of the school community. They know the school well. The range of skills and expertise that they can offer provides you with a balance of challenge and support. Governors ensure that the information you provide is accurate and meaningful. They undertake regular monitoring visits and talk with staff and pupils. Governors value and act upon any advice from the diocese and the local authority. As a result, governance is strong.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors, have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are effective and fit for purpose. Acting as designated safeguarding leader, you are thorough in your work. Your records are detailed and well organised. Staff are quick to report concerns and you follow up these concerns effectively and in a timely manner. As a result of good quality training, staff have a clear understanding of safeguarding processes. There is, therefore, a strong culture of safeguarding in the school.

A sensible and organised approach to pupils' personal, social and health education ensures that pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. During the inspection, officers from the local RAF base were in school to deliver an assembly on the theme of 'be safe, be seen'. The presentation was engaging and informative. The addition of the 'Incredible Hulk' captivated the pupils' attention. When asked what would happen if the driver of a car could not see the 'Hulk', one child from the Reception class replied, 'He'd be squashed.' On leaving the hall, an older pupil commented positively upon the assembly but added, 'If the Hulk rides his bike he really should wear a helmet, not a Santa hat.' The message was clear to all.

Pupils feel safe in school. They are confident in approaching any adult to report any concerns that they might have. The pupils that I spoke to were confident that there was no bullying in school. However, they were equally clear that if it did happen the teachers would sort it out quickly. Pupils talked about the value of 'golden time'. This is time set aside at the end of term for pupils to choose from a range of activities. One pupil told me, 'Pupils always behave well, because no one wants to lose any golden time.' Another added, 'Yes, but I think that they behave well anyway because they follow the golden rules.'

Inspection findings

- Leadership of the early years is well informed. You are aware of what needs to be improved. However, you are also aware of what is working well. Staff in the early years have a clear understanding of children's pastoral needs and offer strong support. Parents confirm this view. When you and I visited the Reception class, the children were reading basic words such as 'stamp', 'long', 'gap' and 'swing'. They were able to identify and sound out each letter or group of letters. Some children were also able to apply these phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) skills in writing. When we returned to the Reception class in the afternoon, the teacher and teaching assistant were making skilful use of questioning to enhance the development of children's vocabulary. Despite this work, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development over the last three years has been variable but remains in line with the national average.
- Leaders have ensured that the teaching of phonics is given an appropriate amount of time each day. When you and I visited the Year 1 class during their phonics session, the pupils were practising their reading and identifying errors in the text. Pupils were able to correctly identify the three errors. However, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the phonics screening check is variable. In 2018, the proportion of Year 1 pupils achieving the expected standard was below the national average.
- You have identified specific barriers to pupils' achievement in mathematics. You have focused on improving pupils' basic skills. In particular, you have focused on counting and calculation. As a result, pupils in key stage 1 are more confident in approaching calculations. Funding from the RAF has increased opportunities for professional development for some staff. This has enabled you to introduce suitable interventions to address the gaps in learning that some pupils have. You have also introduced workshops for parents so that they can support their children in learning. Despite these actions, some pupils do not have a good grasp of the fundamentals of mathematics. This means that they are not able to build upon this knowledge and understanding to tackle more challenging concepts. However, while current pupils are making sustained progress in mathematics, some older pupils are still not confident with their times tables. As a result, some pupils are not confident in their use of mathematical concepts or reasoning and do not make good progress at key stage 2.
- Attainment in writing at key stage 1 has been variable since the last inspection. In 2018, Year 6 pupils' attainment in both writing and English grammar, punctuation and spelling was below the provisional national average. You have

reviewed the teaching of writing. Leaders have introduced new approaches designed to improve the variety and flow of pupils' writing. Pupils are encouraged to use varied 'sentence starters', ranging from description and dialogue to rhetorical questions and similes. When you and I visited the Year 3 and 4 class the pupils were using these techniques to write their own version of a traditional tale. The teacher skilfully used an image of wolves to capture the pupils' imaginations. As a result, the pupils were able to write more creatively. Pupils' writing books demonstrate that they are making good progress over time in their writing. However, their use of accurate English grammar, punctuation and spelling is inconsistent.

- The vast majority of parents spoken to during the inspection and those who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were very positive about the school. A small number of parents expressed concern over communication and how well the school responds to the issues they raise. However, this was not the view of the majority. Leaders, including governors, are aware of these issues and are working to improve the way in which the school deals with parental concerns. Other parents were overwhelmingly positive. One parent commented, 'I would and have recommended this school without a second thought. I could have sent my children to four other schools but decided to keep them at this school as both myself, my husband and my children love the school and staff so much.' Another parent captured the view of the majority who responded, saying, 'Excellent school, dedicated and enthusiastic staff. My children are very happy here.'
- Pupils are happy. They behave well both in lessons and around the school. They follow your 'golden rules' and are honest, hard-working, kind and helpful. Pupils speak very positively about the school and enjoy taking on extra roles and responsibilities such as being a buddy to new pupils or as members of the school council.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the teaching of writing improves, by ensuring that pupils are consistently challenged to apply their grammar, punctuation and spelling skills accurately and consistently in their writing
- the teaching of phonics improves so that the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard by the end of Year 1 increases
- outcomes in mathematics improve by ensuring that more pupils become fluent in the fundamentals of mathematics in key stage 1, so that they can further develop their conceptual understanding, mathematical thinking and use of mathematical reasoning at key stage 2
- persistent absenteeism is reduced.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Newcastle, the regional schools commissioner and the director of

children's services for Northumberland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Murray
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and six governors, including the chair of the governing body. I also met with your early years leader as well as your leaders of English and mathematics. Together with you, we visited classrooms to observe teaching and learning and to look at pupils' work. I also looked in depth at pupils' writing books, mathematics books and other work. I met with a representative of the local authority and a representative of the diocese. I met with a group of pupils from Years 3 to 6. I listened to eight pupils read. I also listened informally to pupils read during my visits to lessons. Consideration was given to the 29 free-text responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 14 questionnaire responses from staff. I also reviewed the 34 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire. I spoke to several parents at the start of the school day. I evaluated recent information in relation to pupils' progress throughout the school, the school's self-evaluation document, the school improvement plan and a sample of monitoring records. I also met with you as designated safeguarding leader and reviewed documentation and records about how you keep your pupils safe.