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Mrs Susan McBeth
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs McBeth

Short inspection of Jarrow Cross Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 January 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 June 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Over the past two years, you have steadily improved outcomes for children in early years and improved the proportion of pupils reaching nationally expected levels at the end of Key Stage 1. You have narrowed gaps in attainment for disadvantaged pupils. A higher than average proportion of pupils now reach the nationally expected level at the end of Year 6 in reading, writing and mathematics and this represents good progress from their starting points. These successes demonstrate the impact of good leadership and the school's capacity for improvement in the future.

You communicate an unwavering determination to provide the very best education for every pupil and this ambition is shared by your leadership team. You have created a culture of professional challenge where staff and other leaders feel well supported to achieve their best and are held to account robustly for the performance of their pupils. Pupils enjoy school, recognise that they are taught well and appreciate the concern that you and your staff show for their welfare. You have the respect of staff, parents and pupils because you are approachable and lead by example.

You are honest and open about the strengths and areas for development in the school. You have been keen to seek external scrutiny and support to help you to fully explore issues and plan the right actions to address them. This has ensured that weaknesses are tackled effectively and has resulted in improved outcomes for pupils.

You have taken decisive action to improve the quality of teaching and have not been afraid to challenge weaker performance. You recognise that in the past, not enough pupils made better than expected progress in some year groups in the school, particularly in mathematics in Key Stage 2. Outcomes for pupils in these areas are beginning to improve, but, appropriately, remain a priority for you in your school development plan.

At the previous inspection, leaders were tasked with ensuring that pupils understand how to produce their best work. You have reviewed your approach to marking and feedback and pupils are confident that the guidance they receive from adults helps them to improve their work. Leaders were also asked to improve the quality of provision in early years. Since your appointment as headteacher, you have worked closely with the local authority to improve teaching in the early years and to provide a more challenging outdoor curriculum for children. These actions have increased the proportion of children reaching the nationally expected level at the end of the Reception Year and gaps have begun to narrow for boys and for disadvantaged pupils. You recognise that this work is still developing and that more children need to reach and exceed the expected levels so that they are ready for Year 1. This is a clearly defined priority in your school development plan.

Additional funding is being used well to support disadvantaged pupils to achieve better outcomes. You have empowered a middle leader to take ownership of this aspect of the school's performance. Teaching assistants have benefited from well-focused professional development. Leaders have conducted more rigorous and frequent checks on the quality of support provided for pupils. This has ensured that teaching assistants are more precisely and effectively deployed to maximise their impact on pupils' progress.

Governors ask challenging questions of senior leaders through a termly school performance review meeting. For example, they have closely checked the school's progress in narrowing gaps for disadvantaged pupils and this has contributed to improved outcomes for this group of pupils. Middle and senior leaders acknowledge the role that governors play in monitoring their work and appreciate the challenge and support they offer.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All staff receive training and guidance so that they know how to keep pupils safe. Appropriate checks are carried out to ensure the suitability of adults to work with children. Senior leaders maintain good-quality records of child protection concerns and are proactive in working with different agencies to safeguard the most vulnerable children. You demonstrate tenacity in pursuing good attendance for all pupils and this has resulted in improved attendance for all pupils and for disadvantaged pupils in the current academic year.

Inspection findings

- You know the school well, have accurately identified aspects of weaker practice and have worked systematically to address them. You have developed a more rigorous process to managing the performance of teachers. Targets set for teachers are closely linked to whole-school priorities for improving pupils' performance, and professional development for teachers and teaching assistants is carefully matched to their needs. This has resulted in improvements in the quality of teaching, for example in phonics (letters and the sounds they represent), where the standards reached by pupils in the Reception and Year 1 classes have steadily increased and are now close to national levels.
- You accurately identified that standards in writing were not high enough in Key Stages 1 and 2. Leaders introduced more exciting texts into literacy lessons and linked these to cross-curricular topics to stimulate pupils' interest in writing. Pupils told me how much they enjoy their literacy lessons because of this. Pupils' work demonstrates that they are now writing at greater length and with more fluency and purpose. You also recognised that pupils' basic skills in grammar, punctuation and spelling were holding back their writing, and so provided training for staff to help them to address this. These actions have resulted in an increase in the proportion of pupils reaching the nationally expected levels in writing in Year 2 and Year 6. Standards of English grammar, punctuation and spelling have also improved and this is reflected in the sharply increased outcomes at the end of Year 6 in 2015.
- Leaders at all levels are uncompromising in their commitment to improving the life chances of disadvantaged pupils. You recognised the need to address gaps in attainment for disadvantaged pupils and sought an external review of pupil premium funding, supported by the governing board, to help you to plan strategically to achieve your goal. Careful tracking of pupils' achievement has enabled leaders to challenge teachers in regular review meetings to set precise targets for individual pupils. The appointment of a middle leader to drive this work has ensured that it has maintained momentum. As a consequence, gaps in attainment for disadvantaged pupils in early years and Key Stage 1 have reduced. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils reaching the nationally expected level in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6 has almost doubled since 2013, and in 2015 was in line with the national average for all pupils.

- Pupils' achievement in mathematics by the end of Year 2 has improved over the past two years and in 2015 was broadly in line with the national average. Similarly, by the end of Year 6, in 2015, the proportion of pupils working at the nationally expected level had improved and was above the national average. However, fewer pupils attained the higher levels in mathematics in Year 6 at the end of 2015. You recognised that while most pupils make at least typical progress across Key Stage 2, not enough are consistently challenged to make the rapid progress they need to in order to reach the higher levels. Leaders have already begun to address this and, as well as sharing good practice within the school, you have brokered expertise and support from another school through the local authority. Leaders' work is already beginning to make a difference to the progress made by pupils. For example, in a Year 5 lesson, the teacher skilfully challenged pupils, through her well-chosen questions, to use their mathematical reasoning to identify missing factors in calculations involving the area of shapes. You acknowledge that this stronger practice is not consistent in all classes and it remains a priority in your strategic plans.
- The proportion of children reaching the expected levels by the end of the early years is steadily increasing. Support from the local authority and leaders' concerted action to improve the quality of teaching and the outdoor curriculum has resulted in more children making better progress. A higher proportion of disadvantaged children and boys are now achieving the nationally expected level at the end of the Reception Year. Leaders recognise that there is still more to do to close attainment gaps fully and to ensure that a higher proportion of children are well prepared for the curriculum in Year 1, and this is a target within the school's development plan.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- a higher proportion of children, including boys and those who are disadvantaged, reach the nationally expected level by the end of Reception
- teaching enables more pupils in Key Stage 2 to make better than expected progress to reach the higher levels of attainment, particularly in mathematics.

Yours sincerely

Claire Brown
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I discussed the work of the school with you and the deputy headteacher, and with middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and three other governors. I also met with the local authority school improvement adviser and conducted a telephone meeting with a diocesan representative. I scrutinised a range of documentation about the school's performance and reviewed the school development plan. I examined information about the attendance and safeguarding of pupils. I reviewed the minutes of governing body meetings. I considered the 28 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 20 responses received to both the staff and pupil questionnaires. I visited classes to observe teaching and learning, including jointly observing teaching with you. I considered samples of work in pupils' books and talked to pupils about their experiences in school.