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Mr Mark Tuffney
Headteacher
Lowther Primary School
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Dear Mr Tuffney

Short inspection of Lowther Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 20 June 2017, 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 your school was judged to be good in April 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Staff, pupils and parents hold you in high regard and value your leadership of the school. You and leaders are committed to further improvements and have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas that need improving.

Since the last inspection, you have restructured the leadership team with a greater focus on the accountability of faculty and phase leaders. This was in response to an area for improvement at the last inspection. As a result, teaching has become more consistent, particularly in key stage 1 and in the teaching of phonics. This has led to more pupils meeting the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check. Leaders have worked determinedly to tackle previous weaknesses in spelling, punctuation and grammar across the school. Consequently, standards are rising.

Governors also have a good understanding of the school's priorities. They know the local community well. Governors are committed and well meaning; however, some areas of their work have not been as sharp as they could have been. These include ensuring that leaders present key policies and performance information to governors in a way that makes it easier to evaluate their impact. In our discussions during the inspection, we agreed that greater urgency and detail in evaluating the impact of strategies were key to further driving improvements.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's procedures for keeping children safe are effective. You and your staff work closely together to achieve this. An important factor in the effectiveness of safeguarding is the strong knowledge that you have about individual pupils. This sense of a strong 'Lowther family' community allows leaders and staff to ensure that they have a clear understanding of individual needs of vulnerable pupils. Leaders and staff discuss safeguarding regularly in meetings. Any concerns raised are followed up quickly. You and your leaders work proactively with parents and outside agencies. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed. Pupils know how to use the internet safely. The school has ensured that even the youngest pupils have access to safety lessons, for example Reception pupils having sessions with St John's Ambulance. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the way the schools looks after their children.

Inspection findings

- To test out your self-evaluation and my hypothesis that the school remains good, we agreed on four key lines of enquiry to explore during the inspection. The first of these was about the progress that pupils make from the early years to the end of key stage 1. We considered the current Year 3 as part of this enquiry because these pupils did not make enough progress in key stage 1. I wanted to find out what the school was doing to improve outcomes for this group.
- I found that teaching within key stage 1 is consistently good with strong teaching of phonics. As a result, the proportion of pupils on track to attain the national standard at the end of Year 1 is rising. Pupils use their knowledge of phonics and apply it to their writing well.
- To improve the progress of Year 3 pupils, you have deployed some of your experienced staff to these classes. This means that these pupils now receive strong teaching. However, you recognise that they need to make accelerated progress in order for them to catch up from previous underachievement.
- The change to a new curriculum with higher standards has been a challenge for the school, particularly in writing. You have tackled previously weaker progress in writing by introducing a number of strategies. We agreed to look at the impact of these as our second line of enquiry.
- The new approach to writing, with a greater focus on 'oracy', is making a difference. This is particularly the case for lower-ability pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, the extent to which it is making a difference varies between year groups. The number of Year 6 pupils on track to attain the expected standard in writing is set to rise this year. However, this is still not as high as it could be, given the high standards they achieved when they were in Year 2.
- Rates of attendance are in line with national averages. The attendance of certain groups, including pupils from other White backgrounds, is noticeably higher than last year. However, the attendance of pupils who have special educational needs

and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils remains lower than other groups.

- For my final line of enquiry, I considered the role of governors in fulfilling their statutory duty to provide information to parents. This is because, when preparing for the inspection, I noticed that key documents were not present or were out of date on the school website.
- During the inspection, up-to-date policies and an analysis of the school's pupil premium funding plans were available. This information meets requirements and is readily available to parents. Information about pupils' performance shows that the pupil premium funding is spent effectively, particularly in key stage 2. However, leaders and governors could be sharper in their analysis of the impact made by this funding. Similarly, policies are not always updated in a timely manner.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- rates of attendance improve for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- pupils' attainment at the end of key stage 1 and levels of progress in writing at the end of key stage 2 improve, so they are at least in line with national standards
- leaders and governors ensure that policies are updated and information is provided to parents in a timely manner.

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

Yours sincerely

Noeman Anwar

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspector carried out the following activities during the inspection:

- meetings with you and other leaders to evaluate school priorities, including safeguarding and attendance
- visits to classrooms alongside school leaders
- meeting with representatives from the governing body and the local authority
- scrutiny of work in pupils' books
- reviewing responses to Ofsted's online surveys, including 118 responses from parents.