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Mrs Andrea Willis
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Willis

Short inspection of Biddick Hall Infants' School

Following my visit to the school on 18 July 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 the school was judged to be good in June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since taking up headship in September 2016, you have focused resolutely on the pupils in your care. You have a steely determination to secure the best possible outcomes for each and every pupil, in terms of their well-being and academic achievement. The pastoral team that you have put in place supports pupils and their families effectively. Pupils make very good progress in their personal, social and emotional development. You have also ensured that pupils' basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics develop apace. Pupils are polite, confident and very cheerful. They feel well looked after in an environment that you have made inclusive and welcoming. Their behaviour is good and their attitudes to learning are excellent.

You are extremely proud of the community that you serve and your commitment to building positive partnerships with families is evident. You have introduced various innovative means of keeping parents and carers better informed about the school's work and their children's progress. Several parents told the inspector that you and staff are in the playground every morning, and are always available to answer their questions or listen if they want to talk. The vast majority of parents who spoke with the inspector, or responded to Ofsted's survey, feel assured that their child is happy, safe and making good progress under your compassionate and watchful eye.

Parents were excited at the prospect of sports day and disappointed that the inspection got in the way. Many are hopeful that it can be rescheduled.

Your aspirations for improvement are high yet realistic. While teaching and learning are good, you envision them evolving further. For example, you quite rightly believe that pupils deserve opportunities to read more regularly with adults in school. You are raising the profile of reading and are developing a new library area to entice and excite pupils into becoming life-long readers. You seek the highest possible quality of teaching and learning and expect the utmost effort from everyone in school.

You feel that it is important to lead by example and therefore strive to model high expectations consistently. Governors and staff are fully committed to your ambitious vision because you have communicated your aims in a clear, convincing manner. Teachers told the inspector that, 'children and families are at the heart of our values.' Staff feel proud to be a part of your team. They are excited about the picture you paint for the future. One adult's comment encapsulated the wider views of staff under your leadership: 'I have never felt more challenged, supported or had such high expectations placed upon me.'

You have tackled recommendations from the previous inspection with success. Alongside governors and other leaders, you monitor the quality of teaching and learning in all classes in a fair and transparent manner. You secure good-quality training and professional enhancement opportunities for staff. They value and appreciate your investment in them. Most adults have their individual development needs addressed effectively. Teachers know precisely where their strengths lie and what they need to do to improve their skills and knowledge further. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can do and achieve have risen as a result of your endeavours. You have correctly identified that you now need to tighten procedures for managing the performance of other adults working in classrooms. You seek to pinpoint the contributions that they make to pupils' learning and outcomes more precisely.

The previous inspection report also challenged you to strengthen improvement planning. On your appointment, you worked diligently with senior leaders and the local authority to create development plans that focused on the correct priorities. You set targets that secured good outcomes for all groups of pupils. Careful evaluation of the school's progress across the year means that leaders are well prepared to build upon these gains. The capacity for further improvement is good.

You have rekindled teachers' passion for the wider curriculum by restructuring the leadership team and defining roles and responsibilities clearly. Supported by your two recently appointed assistant headteachers, subject leaders now insist that all statutory subjects such as science, geography, history, music and art, feature prominently in teachers' planning. The leaders of English and mathematics monitor teaching and learning closely, keeping a careful note of pupils' progress each term. They have rapidly improved the accuracy of their assessment, which you found had previously been overgenerous. Several subject leaders report their findings to you

and governors. However, not all subject leaders are confidently tracking pupils' progress against the national curriculum requirements in their areas of responsibility. You agree that subject leaders need to accurately capture and evaluate pupils' progress and outcomes across the foundation subjects.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are robust. Checks on the suitability of adults working with pupils are thorough. Staff scrutinise the identification of any visiting adults carefully for authenticity, informing visitors of the safeguarding arrangements they must abide by on site. The site is secure and kept in very good condition, meaning it is hazard free.

You are particularly mindful of the need to keep pupils safe and free from harm. Staff and governors benefit from regular training which equips them with the information and awareness needed to protect pupils effectively. Adults know the signs to look out for in their duty to care for pupils and are appropriately vigilant. You have tightened record keeping procedures. Staff understand and adhere to the systems you have put in place; records are well maintained and appropriately detailed.

Along with your team, you are fully committed to ensuring that families and pupils get the individual attention they need, when they need it. Your work with external agencies attests to this; you signpost families to other services and promptly secure additional support where needs arise. Your decision to appoint family support workers enhances this aspect of the school's provision. The range of subtle day-to-day actions that you and your pastoral team take in your work with families demonstrate the importance that you place on pupils' safety and well-being.

Inspection findings

- Staff respect pupils and pupils know that their opinions count. The vast array of playtime resources and equipment that you have invested in are highly valued by pupils. The six-hole golf course and outdoor reading and writing materials are particular favourites. Pupils' warm, positive relationships with you and staff are notable. Several pupils during the inspection said that the staff were one of the best things about their school. Staff play, chat and interact with pupils sociably during break times. One pupil's view captured the opinions expressed by several: 'I love our teachers... they help us learn.'
- You are a strong advocate of positive behaviour management techniques and have embedded a culture whereby staff manage pupils' behaviour in an encouraging and enabling manner. Pupils understand the need for rules, what these entail and, on those rare occasions of misbehaviour, the consequences. As a result, pupils behave in a friendly and respectful manner around this calm, welcoming environment. Pupils' social, emotional and personal needs are met effectively.
- A large proportion of pupils enter the early years with skills of communication, language and literacy that are below those typically expected for their age. You

and staff work diligently to address this area of need. Your aim is to foster a life-long love of reading in pupils. You have ensured that staff and parents have regular access to information and training in the teaching and learning of phonics and early reading. Teachers and additional adults articulate clearly the sounds that letters make. They introduce new, increasingly demanding vocabulary and technical terminology to expand pupils' knowledge and skills.

- Several parents told the inspector that reading homework is regular and appropriate. Working with your English leader, you are examining the amount of reading opportunities and the range of reading materials that staff offer pupils. Pupils who read to the inspector did so with skills appropriate to their age and stage of development. You have, however, quite rightly identified that some pupils need to read more frequently with adults in school.
- You and your pastoral team carefully scrutinise patterns and rates of pupils' attendance. Together, you have tackled individual issues that have led to some pupils being too regularly absent from school. Your work is paying off; fewer pupils are now hindered in their learning and development by poor attendance. In 2016, the proportion of pupils who were regularly absent was 13.7%. This figure has dropped to 9.4%. You are mindful that your work in this area needs to continue if attendance rates are to improve and match averages seen nationally. With this in mind, you have recently employed an additional adult to start in September 2017 to support and challenge pupils and families further.
- Teaching and learning are good. Teachers make clear to pupils the precise focus and purpose of the learning taking place. They explain new concepts and vocabulary carefully to pupils and address promptly misconceptions where these arise. Most adults are skilful in their use of questioning to assess pupils' understanding and to encourage pupils to think deeply about their learning. Pupils' attitudes to learning are splendid; their perseverance and ability to concentrate for sustained periods of time are particularly impressive.
- Teachers usually make good use of additional adults to support pupils' progress. At times, however, additional adults wait for teachers' direction and/or fail to intervene promptly to support and challenge pupils in their learning. You agree and have already begun to investigate means of managing the performance of additional adults more robustly.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils have increased opportunities to read regularly with adults in school
- procedures for managing the work and performance of additional adults are tightened
- subject leaders closely track the progress and achievement of pupils across the wider curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Fiona Manuel

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body, a representative from the local authority and subject leaders. I conducted observations of teaching and learning across year groups with you and looked at pupils' work in books and during lessons. I examined a range of documentation, including policies, the school's self-evaluation and school improvement plans, as well as behaviour and safeguarding information. I took account of 30 free-text messages from parents and 34 parental responses on Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. I also paid attention to 15 survey responses from staff. No pupils responded to the survey, but I spoke formally and informally with pupils and listened to pupils reading.