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Mr Ian Carroll
Executive Headteacher
Rookhope Primary School
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Dear Mr Carroll

Short inspection of Rookhope Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 26 September 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 July 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Through appropriate and realistic evaluation of the school's performance, governors and leaders are well aware of the strengths of the school and the areas to develop further. Through your role as the executive headteacher of three small schools, you are able to maximise opportunities to share good practice. For example, you recognise that the teaching of mathematics, a strength in one school, can support the development of mathematics teaching in Rookhope School. You are proactive in ensuring that staff across the schools have an opportunity to learn from one another and implement improvements.

You have created a caring and friendly school. Pupils say that they all get along well with one another and that bullying does not happen. They say that if they fall out, any disagreements are very quickly resolved with the help of each other and their teachers. Pupils love being at school. One parent said, 'My child cannot wait to arrive.' Pupils value the support that they receive from school staff and they very much enjoy the variety of extra-curricular activities and trips on offer.

Together with highly effective support from the assistant headteacher, you have responded well to the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. The sharing of good practice within school and across schools and support from the local authority is leading to better quality teaching of key stage 1 pupils. The monitoring of teaching and learning is improving. Leaders use a variety of information to evaluate teaching and learning and ensure that teachers receive

appropriate feedback to improve their practice. Leaders have made some progress in improving opportunities for pupils' extended writing across the curriculum, although, due to some absence among the leadership team, you recognise that this is an area to continue developing.

During this inspection, we identified some areas to continue to improve. These include ensuring that pupils who have low prior attainment make better progress and that you continue to improve the provision for children in early years. These are areas that you had already identified and begun to improve.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding is fit for purpose and staff receive appropriate training to keep pupils safe. Staff and governors have completed child protection training and 'Prevent' duty training, which ensures that staff have a good awareness of warning signs that may indicate that pupils need help. Appropriate risk assessments are in place to keep pupils safe in school and on school trips. Staff work effectively with external agencies should the need arise, and keep high-quality records of any concerns and actions taken.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and attendance is excellent, which reflects pupils' love of the school and the excellent relationships among staff, pupils and parents and carers. The school has appropriate systems in place to check on pupils' absence. Leaders are meticulous in working with the local authority and other schools if pupils transfer to or from another school in-year, ensuring that pupils are safe and in education.

Pupils have a good knowledge of how to keep themselves safe in their community, for example when crossing roads and around water. Pupils are able to talk confidently about how to manage risks associated with being online.

During the inspection, leaders identified and responded to minor errors on the single central record of checks made on adults who work at the school. Leaders also ensured that the latest version of the child protection policy was available to parents and updated on the school website.

Inspection findings

- Overall, current pupils are making good progress from their starting points. The number of pupils in the school is too few to make meaningful comparisons with national performance information. Pupils' work, over time, demonstrates that they make good progress in mathematics, reading and writing and across the wider curriculum. However, over time, pupils who had lower starting points did not make as much progress as their peers. Leaders are implementing appropriate action plans to address this.

- Most pupils are making good progress in reading because you are helping them to develop a love of reading. Pupils read every day and describe with enthusiasm the books that they read. Pupils demonstrated their skills in reading unfamiliar words through effective decoding strategies. When they did not understand a word, they were able to describe how they would find out the meaning, for example, by using a dictionary or reading the sentence again and trying to work it out.
- Progress in writing is improving because teachers are providing pupils with more opportunities for extended writing in English, history and religious education. Alongside the additional focus on spelling, the quality of pupils' written work is improving. We agreed, however, that there is further opportunity to develop writing across other curriculum areas.
- The school receives a small amount of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders have carefully considered how to spend this money to have the maximum influence on pupils' progress. For some initiatives, such as the employment of an additional teaching assistant, it is too soon to see the effect. For other initiatives, such as purchasing resources to support and improve pupils' spelling, it is clear that spelling is improving.
- Leaders use the additional funding for physical education and sport well. Pupils develop skills in, and teachers develop their teaching of, a range of different sports. Pupils try sports such as trampolining and archery and take part in adventurous activities such as climbing and abseiling, which supports their social development, healthy lifestyles and risk awareness.
- Assessments take place regularly and leaders and teachers are using these to plan learning carefully to meet the needs of the majority of learners. Leaders ensure that the checking of assessments is thorough and takes place across the three schools overseen by the executive headteacher, the local cluster of schools and with the local authority. However, we agreed that more careful planning to meet the needs of low-prior-attaining pupils and children in early years would lead to more rapid progress.
- Pupils who need additional support receive appropriate help from the teaching assistant and teachers. Pupils are able to work independently on tasks while teachers help or further challenge other pupils. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive good support, and since joining the school are making good progress.
- Through a carefully planned, thematic curriculum, leaders ensure that pupils' personal, social, health and economic education, alongside education about British values, is weaved throughout the curriculum. For example, in religious education, pupils learn about different faiths and cultures, and in topic lessons, they learn about democracy and laws. Pupils could talk about and give their opinions on equality issues relating to school uniform, recently covered by the national press. Leaders supplement the taught curriculum with a regular programme of assemblies, extra-curricular activities, visitors and visits to different places of worship, as well as participation in a 'flamenco day' to ensure that pupils relate their learning to real life beyond their community.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- improving the quality of learning in early years remains a focus so that children are challenged to reach their full potential in all areas of the early years curriculum
- pupils from lower starting points are well challenged in all subjects so that they make better progress in all aspects of their learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Debbie Redshaw

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, your assistant headteacher and a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body. I had a telephone conversation with your education development partner from the local authority. I observed teaching jointly with you and looked at pupils' work with your assistant headteacher. I spoke with pupils formally and informally throughout the day and listened to pupils read. I also examined a range of documentation, including policies, pupils' progress information, school evaluation and improvement plans, and safeguarding information. There were no responses to the staff questionnaire, one response to the pupil questionnaire and four free-text responses from the online questionnaire, Parent View, which I considered.