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Mr Trevor Watson
Headteacher
Melsonby Methodist Primary School
West Road
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Dear Mr Watson

Short inspection of Melsonby Methodist Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 8 December 2015, 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 2011.

This school continues to be good.

Leaders have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Over the past two years, you have steadily improved the outcomes achieved by pupils at the end of Year 6 in reading, mathematics and grammar, punctuation and spelling. The proportion of children reaching the nationally expected level at the end of Reception has also increased. You have shown determination, since your appointment in 2013, to improve the school and the success of your actions to date demonstrates good capacity to secure further improvement.

At the previous inspection, leaders were tasked with improving teachers' use of assessment information so that the work planned for pupils was well matched to their needs. You have introduced a new assessment system which is enabling teachers to identify the gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding more precisely, and plan to address them. Leaders were also asked to make sure that pupils understood how to improve their work. You have reviewed the school's marking policy and pupils are rightly confident that the advice and guidance they receive from their teachers is helping them to move forward in their learning.

Your evaluation of the school's performance is honest and accurate. You have correctly identified the areas where outcomes for pupils are weaker, for example in the proportion of pupils making more rapid progress to exceed the expected levels in writing. You have plans in place to improve these aspects of provision, but you acknowledge that the targets you have set to increase pupils' achievement in writing could be more precisely focused on accelerating pupils' attainment at the highest levels.

Teachers and leaders are keen to reflect on their professional skills and seek out best practice elsewhere. You have provided access to professional networks and professional development beyond the school for your small team of teaching staff. This has resulted in improvements to the quality of education, for example the provision for children in the early years. You have established a partnership with two local schools in similar circumstances and this has supported you to accurately analyse your own school's performance and to provide shared opportunities for pupils, such as a residential visit which would otherwise not have been economically viable for this small school.

Governors robustly challenge the leaders over pupils' achievements and this is helping to sustain good-quality teaching and outcomes. Governors play an active role in the life of the school. They are regular visitors and know the school well. Governors have been proactive in seeking support from the local authority to ensure that they have the skills they need to hold the leadership of the school to account.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All staff receive training and guidance so they know how to keep pupils safe. Appropriate checks are carried out to ensure the suitability of adults to work with children. You demonstrate tenacity in pursuing good attendance for all pupils, including working with external agencies where children have been absent without reason.

The curriculum promotes effective safeguarding through the positive impact on pupils' respect for the different faiths and cultures which are represented in modern Britain, an area for improvement from the previous inspection. Pupils told me that 'we are all equal, but different'. Pupils appreciate the 'Worry Wizard' and the suggestion box which allow them to raise issues in school. They are confident that staff listen to their concerns and take them seriously.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have sustained the good standards of teaching in the school. Your careful monitoring of the teaching of mathematics and your own strong subject knowledge have enabled you to pinpoint the areas which needed improvement and work with staff to address them.

- Pupils receive targeted support to tackle aspects of mathematics where their knowledge is less secure. The work planned for pupils in mathematics allows them to work at appropriate levels of difficulty, dependent on their knowledge and understanding. During the inspection, teaching staff in Key Stage 2 worked relentlessly to uncover pupils' misconceptions and explain them carefully, enabling all pupils to make good progress. The most-able pupils were challenged well and were quickly moved on to more sophisticated work once they had demonstrated that they had mastered the initial tasks.
- Leaders have taken effective action to improve pupils' reading skills. Pupils enjoy the opportunities they have to read for pleasure and to access the library, which they play a role in managing with support from the Chair of the Governing Body. Guided small-group sessions, where teachers ask carefully focused questions, develop pupils' comprehension skills well.
- You correctly identified that pupils were not making progress as quickly in writing as in other subjects. A focus on pupils' grammar and punctuation in writing has improved this aspect of their work, but this has not yet enabled enough pupils to reach the higher levels in writing of which they are capable. You have refined the system for teachers to assess pupils' writing so that assessments are accurate and identify the most important next steps for pupils. Middle leaders have talked to pupils to find out their views about writing and have established that they enjoy writing for a clear purpose and audience. Teachers have begun to increase the opportunities for pupils to do just that. In Key Stage 2, pupils wrote with flair and enthusiasm when reporting on a dinosaur crime scene that their teacher had created. Pupils have embraced the recently introduced roles of editor and journalists for a regular pamphlet in the local parish magazine. However, these opportunities are not yet the norm within the curriculum for writing, particularly in Key Stage 1. You recognise this and are taking steps to address it.
- Standards in the early years have steadily increased over the past three years. Teaching staff have benefited from opportunities to observe practice in other schools, including those with mixed-age classes. Leaders have also taken action to ensure that teachers make use of assessment in the early years to plan the correct next steps for children. As a result, children make at least typical progress and most make better than typical progress in some areas of learning. A higher proportion of children than the national average reached the expected level for the end of the Reception Year in 2015 in reading and writing. However, leaders have accurately identified that more children need to make more rapid progress to enable them to exceed the expected level for their age in all areas of learning; this is an area of focus in the school's development plan.
- Leaders have given high priority to ensuring pupils' safety. The curriculum has ensured that pupils can talk confidently about managing risks to their online safety. Pupils appreciate the opportunities they have received through the 'Crucial Crew' events at RAF Leeming to learn about various aspects of safety, including fire safety, alcohol misuse, and safe practices on water and near building sites. Pupils have a well-developed understanding of the responsibility they have to keep themselves safe.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- precise targets are set for the proportion of pupils making good or better progress in writing so that more pupils reach the highest levels of attainment in writing
- a higher proportion of children in the early years make more rapid progress to exceed the expected level at the end of the Reception Year.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for North Yorkshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

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, the literacy leader, the Chair of the Governing Body and another governor. I also met with the local authority school improvement partner. I scrutinised a range of documentation about the monitoring and evaluation of school performance and teaching and learning. I also reviewed the school development plan. I examined information about pupils' progress, attendance, exclusion and the safeguarding of pupils. I reviewed external evaluations of aspects of the school's work and the minutes of governing body meetings. I considered the 15 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) and a letter received from a parent. 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 learning.