

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Mrs Gillian Elliott  
Headteacher  
Allithwaite CofE Primary School  
Church Road  
Allithwaite  
Grange-over-Sands  
Cumbria  
LA11 7RD

Dear Mrs Elliott

### **Short inspection of Allithwaite C of E Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 21 March 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 May 2013.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

Since your appointment as headteacher in November 2015, you have taken well-considered steps to develop the school as a vibrant hub of the community. Together with staff, governors and pupils, you have defined the core values of the school: hope, creativity, responsibility, friendship, courage and wisdom. These values are considered deeply by pupils, are prominently displayed in classrooms and are a focus for worship. Pupils take their responsibilities to uphold the values seriously; older pupils nurture younger ones and actively find ways to help improve the school and the local community. The school council's involvement in promoting road safety in the village is an indication of pupils' consideration and resourcefulness. Individual differences are valued in this inclusive community in which everyone's talents are celebrated: I saw budding guitarists proudly giving an outdoor performance for pupils arriving at school on the chilly morning of the inspection and willing volunteers providing reflective prayers during assembly.

A key strength of the school is the candour of leaders' self-evaluation and its direct link to a manageable improvement plan whose priorities staff and governors have agreed. There is a strong sense of teamwork and a shared determination that Allithwaite should equip pupils as thoughtful and capable young citizens.

Since the previous inspection, you have opened a nursery. This gives children a good start to their education. They are immersed a wide range of well-designed activities. You recognise that more could be done to develop children's experience

of learning outdoors and have ambitious plans to improve the school grounds to this end.

You have adapted the curriculum to meet more-challenging national expectations, while ensuring that school is a place that pupils continue to enjoy. Pupils' attainment at key stages 1 and 2 was above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics in 2016, with most pupils making good progress from their starting points.

Last year, the proportion of pupils achieving the national expectation in the phonics screening test at the end of Year 1 was untypically low for the school. You have analysed the reasons behind this apparent decline and taken steps to ensure that the teaching of phonics is consistently good and that it provides pupils with a secure foundation for their early reading and writing skills.

At the last inspection, leaders were asked to improve the quality of mathematics teaching so that pupils could solve problems more rapidly. You have appointed a knowledgeable and enthusiastic mathematics leader, who is supporting teachers to develop pupils' reasoning skills. We agreed that, while teachers are using a helpful, consistent approach to teaching mathematics, there are times when activities could be adapted more quickly to meet the needs of individual pupils so that all are challenged at the appropriate level.

You have developed an interesting curriculum supplemented by a wide range of clubs. Pupils speak highly of their residential experiences. Photographic displays around the school capture the richness of life as an Allithwaite 'owl', while pupils' written work is lively and engaging, in response to interesting stimuli. Science teaching is being developed to include a greater focus on investigative skills. We agreed that pupils' use of terminology needs further development to help them explain their ideas.

Attendance declined a little in 2016 and continues to be below the national average. Your analysis indicates that there are valid reasons for most absences. A recent bout of chicken pox affected attendance for some pupils. You continue to work with families and try to dissuade them from taking term-time holidays.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school's safeguarding policy is updated regularly and provides essential information with which all staff are familiar. It is applied consistently and clear records are kept in relation to child protection and pupils' safety. Staff are trained to be vigilant; they are aware of risks that pupils might face, including when they are online. Staff take effective steps to educate pupils to stay safe. They know pupils well as individuals and are alert to any changes in their behaviour. Pupils and their parents expressed confidence in the school's pastoral work. All necessary checks are carried out to confirm the suitability of adults to work with children. The school site is safe and is maintained very well.

## Inspection findings

- The nursery has made a positive difference to the school and community. As one parent commented: 'It gives the children a great start and they have so much fun.' Children enjoy their activities and quickly develop a range of skills. Staff track and celebrate children's development and ensure that parents are included in their learning. Children's early reading, writing and counting skills are encouraged, both indoors and outdoors. The outdoor environment offers potential for further development and the school's creative staff have exciting plans to make the most of the available space. Children's transition from the Nursery class into the Reception class is smooth. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year has risen steadily over the last three years and is above average.
- In 2014 and 2015, most pupils achieved well in the phonics screening test at the end of Year 1. In 2016, fewer pupils were successful, for reasons that you have investigated. You have put in place individual support that has successfully boosted the skills of pupils who narrowly missed achieving the national standard last year. They are well placed for success in Year 2. The teaching of phonics is systematic and well-paced. A range of well-chosen resources helps pupils to learn about letters and sounds. We observed children in the early years excitedly selecting objects from a 'mystery bag', matching them to letters representing their initial sounds and then finding the same sounds in classmates' names. In key stage 1, pupils built on their early knowledge to recognise spelling patterns. Their teacher was careful to ensure that pupils pronounced words correctly as they wrote the corresponding words.
- The school-wide focus on mastery in mathematics is evident in teaching across year groups. Teachers use a consistent approach to plan mathematics lessons. We observed pupils giving well-reasoned responses when working out how many combinations of shapes could make 'polyominoes' or when calculating the cost of paint to cover a wall, whose area pupils first had to establish. There is some unevenness in the progress being made in different classes, but your detailed tracking of pupils' achievement leads to support being provided quickly where pupils have misunderstood concepts.
- Pupils benefit from a broad and rich curriculum. A clear focus on investigative science was apparent in the photographs and writing celebrating 'science week', which culminated in pupils learning how to use a defibrillator. Displays around the school show pupils' enjoyment in investigating how organs of the body work. Input from a specialist science teacher from Cartmel Priory CofE School is valued by staff and pupils alike and supports the academic transition to secondary school. Pupils write for a range of audiences and purposes. Reminiscences written by pupils in upper key stage 2, in the voice of a local war veteran, are especially poignant and well crafted.
- You and your governors have seized opportunities to work in partnership with local schools to develop the curriculum, share effective practice and check assessments of pupils' work. The chair of the governing body has a pivotal role in organising relevant training for governors on the South Lakes peninsula. You have valued the support of colleague headteachers during your first year in post.

Your staff are outward-looking and keen to develop their skills. They value your leadership and have great optimism for the school's future.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers adapt tasks and approaches flexibly in response to pupils' skills and understanding so that their learning is deepened
- opportunities are taken to develop pupils' vocabulary so that they use terminology confidently when explaining their ideas
- the quality of outdoor provision is enhanced for children in the early years.

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

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you and with subject leaders for mathematics and science and an early years teacher to discuss improvements since the last inspection. You and I visited all classes and observed the teaching of mathematics and phonics. I spoke with 10 parents at the start of the day and considered 26 responses to Ofsted's Parent View survey, along with a letter from a parent. I spoke with staff and read their survey responses. I also read the responses made by 17 pupils to Ofsted's survey and spoke with pupils informally during the day. I met with five members of the governing body and discussed the school's work with representatives of the local authority and the diocese.

I considered examples of work in pupils' exercise books and on displays around the school and I read the school improvement plan, self-evaluation document and your most recent report to the governing body. I read the information on the school website and scrutinised the school's record of checks made to confirm the suitability of adults to work with children.