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Mrs Jillian Harrison-Longworth  
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Dear Jillian Harrison-Longworth

### **Short inspection of Blennerhasset School**

Following my visit to the school on 13 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 December 2013.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school has been challenged by a number of difficult circumstances but has responded to these with resilience. You told me about the repeated flooding the school suffered around the time of Storm Desmond. The school responded by working with pupils and outside partners to produce a story book linked to the flooding. This successful project indicates how the school is able to turn challenges into opportunities. It took some time to restore the school's outside facilities to be as good as possible. However, the re-established outdoor area for early years children now gives good opportunities for them to learn through their play. You shared the plans for an extension to replace the log cabin lost in the floods and explained how these will improve the school further.

The school's small size helps it to have a strong family feeling. Pupils and parents explained that they really like this aspect of the school. Staff have improved how they include pupils in discussion about developing their school. For example, after discussion with pupils, 'Believe, achieve, succeed' has been established as a simple way of setting out the school's aims. Staff work together well as a team which reflects their commitment to the pupils. Your shared high expectations are seen in the challenge for everyone at the school to 'be the best version of themselves they can be'. You make this happen by setting a clear example in your approach.

You have an accurate view of the school's strengths and the things which still need development. The school's improvement plan recognises shortcomings and sets out ways to make sure improvement happens. You know that the plan's current version

could be sharpened by including more detail about the impact you expect actions to have. However, you intend to build this in as your plan is further developed later this term.

At the previous inspection, inspectors identified the need to improve the quality of teaching. The school's own records show that teaching has become gradually more and more effective. This has been as a result of systematic training for staff, including sharing ideas at staff meetings and careful monitoring. You use the school's system for checking the overall performance of teachers effectively. In addition, staff regularly review how well pupils are doing and teachers use the resulting information to help them to plan pupils' learning. I saw pupils trying hard and engaging well with their learning.

The parents I spoke with and who responded to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire were very positive about the school. All who responded would recommend the school to others. Parents recognise how staff go out of their way to ensure that the school offers the best it can. They say that staff respond to the learning and wider needs of individual pupils and support their families.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders and governors have ensured that the arrangements for safeguarding pupils are thorough. Record-keeping is detailed. The school's child protection policy is available on the school website and further information for parents is available in school. Staff are carefully trained to help them look after children and this training is regularly updated. For example, staff will receive additional training about equalities later this term.

Governors are fully aware of their responsibilities for keeping children as safe as possible. For example, they recently ensured that an electronic locking system was installed on the school gates.

Pupils say that they feel safe. This is, in part, because they get along together so well, with older pupils looking after younger ones. They are taught about bullying but told me that there is no bullying in the school.

### **Inspection findings**

- You, other members of staff and governors work together to ensure that the school runs smoothly and continues to improve. Governors are aware of the pressures that unavoidable staff changes can bring, but work hard to make sure that arrangements are put in place for pupils to receive the best possible education. Your approach to training staff means that the school builds up the experience and confidence of the staff team. You also work with other schools to share expertise in the school's strengths, such as the effective early years provision.
- Over time, the school's published outcomes in mathematics have varied. Sometimes outcomes are above the national figures but at other times below. For

example, you were disappointed in the relatively low test scores that Year 6 pupils achieved in mathematics in 2017. You know that one of the complications of working in a very small school is that it is difficult to compare how well different year groups do. However, it is important that you make sure that staff continue to think carefully about how they teach and pupils learn in mathematics to resolve any underlying problems.

- The school has a rich and varied curriculum. You make sure that pupils experience well-balanced teaching, with different subjects having their proper place. I saw pupils singing in one of their weekly music sessions with real enthusiasm as they practised songs for this year's harvest festival. You also make sure that pupils have a science lesson each week. In addition to the different subjects offered, pupils are provided with planned opportunities to develop as people, such as in their self-confidence and self-esteem. You know that this helps their learning now and will support them in the future.
- Teaching continues to improve. The well-planned training and other development opportunities for staff have supported improvements. In addition, you have reviewed the way that you assess pupils, to make sure that this fits in with the national curriculum and meets the particular needs of your school. You have increased the frequency of the reviews of pupils' performance to make sure that teachers can more precisely adjust their teaching to help pupils. If pupils have any gaps in their learning, teachers provide additional teaching to individuals or small groups. This approach raises expectations and achievement.
- While pupils' attendance is around the national average overall, the published figures show that more girls than expected had long-term absence in 2016. You identified this issue at the time and investigated the reasons. This allowed you to sort out the problem. You continue to remind parents that they need to ensure that their children have as little absence as possible.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to consider why there is variability in outcomes in mathematics and closely monitor the effectiveness of mathematics teaching so that any necessary further action can be taken.

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

Yours sincerely

David Selby  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, I met with you and with the mathematics coordinator to discuss the school's effectiveness. I also met with governors and a representative of the local authority. I had a telephone conversation with the headteacher of a local school with which you work. I met with a group of pupils and talked with others around the school and during lessons. I toured the school, accompanied by you. I observed teaching and learning in classes across the school and heard a small group of pupils read. I scrutinised a sample of pupils' mathematics books. I examined documents including information about safeguarding for pupils, the school's self-evaluation document and the improvement plan. I considered 16 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, together with an additional written response from a parent and spoke with some parents at the start of the school day. Three responses to Ofsted's survey for members of staff were received.