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Mr Mike Pincombe
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Dear Mr Pincombe

Short inspection of North Lakes School

Following my visit to the school on 18 September 2018, 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. You lead a happy, welcoming and very inclusive school where you teach pupils to be reflective and resilient learners. As a result of the determined leadership of you and your deputy headteacher, staff provide a nurturing environment which develops pupils' confidence.

Since the previous inspection, you have taken a reflective and analytical approach to school development, making improvements to teaching in subjects including English. Leaders have ensured that staff training has enhanced staff's skills. Teachers value opportunities to work together and with other schools to improve their practice. As a result of improvements that you have made, standards in reading, writing and mathematics have risen.

Governors provide just the right balance of support and challenge for leaders. They have a wide range of professional skills and attend regular training. Governors are frequent visitors and know the school very well. They keep a close watch on pupils' progress, including that of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. As a result of their regular monitoring, governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They have carefully monitored improvements in pupils' achievements in writing and have a good understanding of the recent changes to teaching in mathematics.

Pupils are very proud to be members of North Lakes School. They behave well in lessons and around the school, showing kindness and courtesy to others. Pupils

spoken to during the inspection described how they learn to follow the school's motto to 'treat others as they would wish to be treated'. You teach pupils to value and respect each other's differences, including disability, religion and race. Pupils value the many opportunities they have to represent the school, including in sports and music. They described how much they enjoyed a visit to Newcastle to take part in the Big Sing event. They relish opportunities to play in the school's orchestra and sing in the choir. Pupils develop their skills across a range of sports. They are proud of their successes in competitions, including football, cricket, tennis and gymnastics.

Parents and carers share pupils' very positive view of the school. Parents that I met with on the school playground were very keen to describe how much they value the support that staff give to pupils, including those who have SEN and/or disabilities. They appreciate how staff are willing to go 'above and beyond' to provide families with support and advice. Parents welcome regular communication from school, including texts, newsletters and emails.

You have responded well to the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The quality of teaching has been strengthened and, as a result, pupils' outcomes across the school have improved. Provisional data for 2018 shows that the proportions of pupils reaching the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6 were above 2017 national averages. In lessons, teachers check pupils' understanding and staff give well-planned support for pupils falling behind. Leaders recognise that in some lessons and in some subjects, further challenge would improve the progress of the most able pupils in different areas of the curriculum, so that more reach the higher standards by the end of key stage 2.

In response to the previous inspection, you have planned a curriculum which helps pupils to use their initiative and develop their thinking. In philosophy lessons, pupils learn to think critically and to discuss their ideas with each other. You teach pupils to work independently and be resourceful in their learning.

You have taken the right steps to improve how mathematics is taught across the school. Pupils are confident with number and calculate with confidence and accuracy. However, leaders have recognised that pupils need more opportunities to develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills in mathematics. The recent changes that you have made to teaching in this aspect of mathematics are at an early stage and have not embedded.

You were also asked to improve pupils' attainment and progress in writing. Since the previous inspection, you have improved how teachers develop pupils' writing skills and standards have improved. Teachers give pupils clear guidance about how to evaluate and improve their work. Pupils write fluently for a range of different purposes. They successfully apply their grammar, punctuation and spelling skills in their writing. Pupils' handwriting is neat and well formed, and pupils write at length. Scrutiny of pupils' work and your checks on pupils' learning show that pupils make good progress in their writing.

Leaders work closely with the school's feeder infant school to assess pupils' attainment in writing. When pupils start North Lakes School, assessments are carried out in reading, writing and mathematics. This ensures that leaders have an accurate view of pupils' progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have made sure that safeguarding arrangements are thorough, fit for purpose and of high quality. They have put in place thorough systems to carry out statutory checks on the suitability of staff to work with children.

Through regular training, staff and governors have up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding. Leaders give staff regular safeguarding briefings and updates. As a result, staff are vigilant about the potential risks pupils may face. Leaders work closely with parents and other professionals to make sure that pupils are safe.

Staff teach pupils about how to keep themselves safe, including online and road safety. Useful safeguarding advice is shared with parents and carers on the school's website. The pupils spoken to during the inspection, or responding to Ofsted's online questionnaire for pupils, said that bullying is rare and that teachers deal quickly with any concerns that they have. Visitors to school, including those from Barnardo's and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty against Children (NSPCC), develop pupils' understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Staff, parents and pupils agree that pupils are safe.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on a number of key lines of enquiry, the first of which was related to pupils' attendance. Pupils enjoy coming to school and their attendance is broadly in line with national averages. However, absence for disadvantaged pupils is higher than that of other pupils nationally. The absence of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is also higher than other pupils nationally. Leaders use additional funding for pupils well, including to improve their attendance. Staff check the attendance of pupils regularly and diligently follow up absences with parents. You quickly put in place measures to prevent pupils from becoming missing in education. Your parent support adviser works closely with families to encourage pupils to attend school daily. You have introduced a range of initiatives to encourage pupils to come to school, including certificates and prizes for high attendance. The impact of measures that you have put in place is that the attendance of some of these vulnerable pupils has increased. However, you are ambitious for attendance for the whole school, including for pupils with additional funding, to improve further.
- During the inspection, I found that leaders and staff provide a nurturing environment which allows pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities to thrive. They are happy and well cared for by the enthusiastic and skilled staff. Inclusion for every pupil lies at the heart of the school's ethos. Pupils who attend the school's resourced provision make good progress in their learning from their varied

starting points. This is because the experienced special educational needs coordinator has planned an engaging and interesting curriculum for this group of pupils. Bright and attractive examples of pupils' art enhance the well-resourced, attractive classroom. Trips and visits are planned to develop pupils' independence and learning. Teachers identify pupils' barriers to learning very accurately and teaching precisely matches their abilities. Staff work closely with other professionals, including speech therapists and physiotherapists, to ensure that pupils' varied needs are met. As a result, pupils in the resource provision achieve well.

- In other classes in school, leaders make sure that pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities receive additional support to help them catch up and make good progress. Experienced support staff work closely with teachers to plan and deliver additional support in mathematics and English. Because of the quality of support this group of pupils receive, they make good progress and their gaps in learning are narrowed and often closed.
- The next key line of enquiry related to whether pupils are receiving a broad and balanced curriculum. Those pupils with whom I spoke said that learning across the curriculum is interesting and fun. Leaders plan visits and trips to enrich pupils' learning, such as a residential visit to London for pupils in Years 5 and 6. Older pupils relish the outdoor and adventurous trips that you plan, where they take part in activities including canoeing and ghyll scrambling, improving their confidence and independence. Pupils develop their skills very well across a range of sports and enjoy the many opportunities to perform in music. Your skilled computing leader develops pupils' understanding of online safety alongside their computing skills. Pupils learn to be thoughtful and kind. Older pupils are given many leadership responsibilities, helping out at playtimes and lunchtimes, in assemblies and through the school council. Leaders and pupils agree that in some subjects, pupils have fewer opportunities to develop their skills. This is because leaders have concentrated school improvement on raising standards in mathematics and English. Leaders are taking the right steps to improve the balance of curriculum planning so that pupils, including the most able, fully develop their skills across different subjects.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- staff embed recent improvements in mathematics teaching so that pupils have more opportunities to develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills
- they build upon the effective actions already taken to improve the attendance of pupils
- teachers develop and deepen pupils' skills and knowledge across the curriculum
- teachers provide increased challenge for the most able pupils so that an increased proportion reached the higher standards across the 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 Cumbria. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Stevens
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher and leadership team. I met with three teachers and took account of 17 staff responses to Ofsted's online survey. I also met with four governors. I spoke with a representative of the local authority and the virtual school headteacher. I met with 11 pupils and spoke informally with other pupils during lessons. I took account of 71 pupil responses to Ofsted's online survey. I visited classes with you, where I observed teaching and learning and looked at pupils' work. I visited the school's singing assembly. I also heard pupils from Year 3 and Year 6 read.

I spoke with parents at the start of the school day. I took account of 28 responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, including free-text responses and one handwritten letter from a parent. I looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan and evaluations of teachers' performance. I checked behaviour and attendance logs and analysis. I also evaluated safeguarding procedures, including policies to keep pupils safe and safeguarding checks. I undertook a review of the school's website.