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Mr Andrew Hyde  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Hyde

### **Short inspection of Milnthorpe Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 6 March 2019, 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 March 2015.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You and your staff provide a well-maintained and welcoming environment that supports pupils' learning effectively. Displays around the building celebrate pupils' best work and contribute well to the development of pupils' self-esteem.

You and your leadership team have an accurate view of the quality of education that the school provides. You have devised a thorough action plan for improvement, which you have based on a precise analysis of recent, published assessment information. You have been clear about the intended impact of your actions on pupils' achievement.

You have addressed the areas for improvement that inspectors identified at the previous inspection. You have taken prompt and effective action to raise pupils' achievement further in writing.

You have introduced a new, more-targeted approach to developing pupils' skills in grammar, punctuation and spelling. This includes strategies such as encouraging pupils to learn how to spell more complex words by breaking them into smaller segments. You have also revised the school's approach to teaching phonics in key stage 1 to support pupils' development in writing. This approach has enabled teachers to address gaps in pupils' knowledge more effectively and it allows more flexibility in the organisation of pupils into learning groups. Because of these actions, current pupils make good progress in writing.

There has been a change in the approach to leadership in the school. Governors were clear, when they recruited you as headteacher in 2016, that they wanted a more shared approach to leadership, in keeping with the recommendation from the previous inspection. It was very clear during my visit that the leadership structure is now less centralised. Subject leaders, for example, carry out regular checks on the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects. They do this by, for instance, scrutinising pupils' work or observing in lessons. They feed back any areas for development to staff, so that teachers can improve their practice and ask for further support if they need it. Subject leaders have a good grasp of standards in their subject. Their work contributes effectively to the good progress that most current pupils make across the curriculum.

You and the governing body are clear about the educational experience that you want your pupils to have. You have established a broad and interesting curriculum, which contributes effectively to pupils' overall development. Your principle of encouraging learning in context, with a particular focus on enhancing pupils' vocabulary, leads you to provide a rich variety of activities to enhance pupils' learning. These include residential trips and visits to places such as York to support pupils' study of history, for instance.

During the inspection, I met with a group of pupils who spoke enthusiastically about their enjoyment of the range of activities and subjects that they experience in school. They also said that they appreciate the clubs that the school provides, such as baking, hockey and choir. They also enjoy taking part in a variety of sports competitions. They have had considerable success, winning tournaments in sports such as lacrosse.

You also take effective action to support pupils' mental and physical health. For example, you have recently arranged for the installation of new outdoor fitness equipment in the playground. This has expanded the choice of physical activities that pupils can take part in during playtime and lunchtime. You also promote pupils' mental health well. For instance, you encourage an approach to learning that helps pupils to recognise that they can learn from their mistakes. This is effective in developing pupils' resilience and confidence, qualities which came through very clearly in my conversations with pupils.

The vast majority of parents are highly positive about the school. Typically, they commented on the school 'educating the whole child' and felt it is a 'safe and fun environment'.

Staff are very positive about their work in school. They regard you and your senior leaders as approachable and supportive. They appreciate the range of training that leaders provide and feel it improves their performance.

The local authority has confidence in your leadership and correctly recognises the good quality of education you and your staff provide. It lends effective support at a level appropriate to the school's needs.

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school's required record of checks on members of staff is comprehensive and complies with the government's guidance. There is a secure entry system to the premises. The electronically stored records of concerns about pupils are detailed and of high quality. The designated leader for safeguarding responds to concerns in a timely manner and makes referrals to other agencies when necessary.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Staff are well trained in safeguarding and have a secure knowledge of the different signs of abuse. They promptly record any concerns about pupils' welfare on the school's electronic system.

Pupils feel safe in school and know that they can talk to any member of staff if they have a concern. There is also a 'worry box', into which they can place written concerns, which a member of staff checks frequently and follows up as required. Pupils benefit from the school's systematic programme of sharing information to help pupils to keep themselves safe. For example, they know that they should not reveal personal information when using the internet. Teachers also make them aware of the age restrictions on computer games and tell them which ones are suitable for primary school pupils.

There are no recorded examples of bullying of any kind, including racist or homophobic incidents. Staff respond to any disagreements between pupils swiftly and effectively. Pupils' behaviour is typically very good.

## **Inspection findings**

- At the start of the day, I shared with you the key lines of enquiry, which I followed during the inspection. One of these concerned pupils' progress in writing by the end of Year 6. Assessment information at the end of Year 6 in 2018 showed that attainment at the expected standard or above was in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils who attained greater depth was above average. Progress in writing matched that of other pupils nationally. However, it was some way behind the progress that pupils in school made in reading and mathematics, which was well above the national average. You correctly identified progress in writing as an area to strengthen and have taken effective action to bring this about. You now carry out internal moderation of writing, which enables staff to check that standards are consistent across different year groups. You have also introduced work to enhance pupils' vocabulary, so that by Year 6 they are familiar with more-challenging words in appropriate contexts, like 'concerned', 'irresponsible' and 'consequences'.
- You have also provided staff with training in a more focused approach to the teaching of writing skills. Examples of work that I saw showed that current pupils are making good and improving progress in writing. Many, particularly the most able, show that they can use increasingly sophisticated language and structures.

For example, most-able pupils in Year 6 use phrases such as 'a gleaming world of sparkle and colour', demonstrating a strong grasp of more adventurous and engaging vocabulary. However, because leaders have not fully embedded current strategies across the school, pupils' progress in writing by the end of Year 6 is not as strong as it is in reading and mathematics. There is also occasionally a lack of opportunities for some pupils in key stage 1 to apply for themselves the writing skills that they have learned.

- My next key line of enquiry related to the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in writing. As well as the strategies mentioned previously, you have put in place a number of extra methods of support for this group of pupils. These include additional activities, led by teaching assistants, which focus on addressing any gaps in pupils' writing skills that teachers have identified through their assessment procedures. Evidence from work analysis shows that current pupils make good progress. Most of them show appropriate skills for their age group, with some showing greater complexity in their language and sentence structures. For example, pupils in Year 2 make good attempts at similes such as 'as long as a road' when describing an animal's tail. In Year 5, most-able pupils write interesting sentences such as, 'Black shadows loomed spookily in the watery abyss.'
- Another key line of enquiry concerned the progress of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, in the wider curriculum. My analysis of pupils' work in a range of subjects other than English and mathematics indicated that pupils make good progress. Pupils acquire knowledge, understanding and skills well at a standard appropriate to their age group. There is a broad range of subjects available in the curriculum. You enhance pupils' experience of these subjects through extra activities, such as educational visits. Teachers also provide opportunities for pupils to use their writing and mathematical skills to good effect. For example, in key stage 2, they write about the revolt of the Iceni tribe when studying Roman history and use numerical tables to record findings in science. Although pupils generally make good progress, the work provided for most-able pupils in history is sometimes too easy.
- My final line of enquiry looked at leaders' and governors' understanding of their statutory responsibilities. Leaders and governors fulfil their responsibilities well. Governors, for example, make a considerable contribution to securing good standards in the school. They challenge leaders effectively and hold them to account strongly. They have a clear understanding of the quality of education that the school provides. Governors are well trained in safeguarding and ensure that the school keeps its pupils safe. There is a dedicated governor who has a background in these matters. He holds regular discussions with the headteacher, which provide him with a detailed overview of the effectiveness of safeguarding in school.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they take further steps to strengthen pupils' progress in writing, so that by the end of Year 6 it more closely matches what pupils achieve in reading and mathematics
- teachers in key stage 1 more consistently provide pupils with opportunities to apply their writing skills for themselves
- teachers more consistently provide challenging work in history for most-able pupils.

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

Mark Quinn  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

With you, I carried out short visits to the early years and lessons in all year groups in key stage 1 and key stage 2. I analysed pupils' work in a variety of subjects. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation summary, action plans for school improvement, minutes of meetings of the governing body and records connected with the safeguarding of pupils. I held discussions with you, other members of staff, governors and pupils. I had a discussion by telephone with a representative of the local authority. I evaluated 66 responses received through Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. I also analysed 55 responses to the pupil questionnaire and 17 responses to the staff survey.