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Dear Mrs Crawford

Short inspection of Lowca Community School

Following my visit to the school on 19 January 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 February 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You, along with the staff and governing body, ensure that your school is one where every individual is expected to flourish. You work tirelessly so that each pupil is nurtured and provided with a personalised teaching and support programme that meets his or her individual needs. As a result, every pupil has the opportunity to excel and the standards that pupils achieve continue to improve year on year. Parents recognise and value the school and its role in the community. They believe you are successful in bringing to fruition the school's mission – 'be the best you can and be happy'. Parents describe the school as 'a gem in the community' where 'children are happy and flourish'. This is because relationships are strong; everyone is valued. This reflects your philosophy that no pupil should be left behind and your mantra that pupils must be supported, guided and encouraged to 'keep up and catch up'. Across the school, from the early years foundation stage to key stage 2, 'the Lowca effect' is working its magic. Your and your teachers' passion for learning is infectious. The impact is visible in pupils' evident love of learning. Pupils are happy in school and achieve very well by the end of key stage 2.

You have ensured that the school is fully inclusive. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are identified early, are well supported and, as a result, make secure progress. Leadership of this area is a key strength. The care that these pupils receive is fluid and responsive to their changing developmental

needs. Pupils, when ready, move off support and intervention programmes because the action taken is effective. The focus on building self-esteem, emotional resilience and positivity in your pupils is exemplary because it strengthens pupils' learning and development. Parents and pupils value this support. Indeed, this accounts for why some parents move into the community or travel a distance to access your provision. You also ensure that every pupil has a full understanding of different pupils' needs and their unique qualities. Pupils value the work you and your staff do to teach them about tolerance, diversity and respect, for example in autism week. The spirit of the school is underpinned by your core message that pupils must value one another for their personality rather than what they look like or the things they may own.

Since the last inspection, you have taken effective action to ensure that your school continues to improve. You have rightly focused on the development of pupils' writing skills in the early years foundation stage and in key stage 1. You have done this by increasing pupils' motivation to write and develop a love of learning. One example is where pupils now use drama, games and structured play to spark their imagination before writing about their experiences. The result is that pupils' writing has improved significantly. You now project that every pupil will achieve the expected standard by the end of their key stage and there is strong evidence to support this.

Alongside writing, mathematics was also a key area for improvement in the last inspection. The standard pupils reach in mathematics is improving rapidly, despite some pupils' very low starting points. By the end of the early years foundation stage and key stage 1, around the same proportion as is found nationally now reach the expected standard in mathematics. You achieve this by creating exciting opportunities to interweave mathematics across the curriculum. Pupils enjoy using the outdoor classroom to solve practical mathematical problems. On 'real maths Thursday', pupils apply theoretical mathematics to practical situations. In art, pupils have undertaken a Picasso project and explored angles and shape. The result of your drive and determination is that practically every pupil talks about mathematics and science as being favourite subjects. It is testimony to your and your team's commitment that, by the end of key stage 2, all pupils now reach at least the expected standard in mathematics. They catch up to other pupils nationally.

Following on from these successful improvements, we agreed the next steps to improve provision further. First, we discussed how you might harness and foster pupils' love of mathematics to enable even more pupils to achieve the highest standard by the end of key stage 2. In the lessons that we visited together, pupils' aptitude in mathematics was clearly visible. We agreed that pupils need greater opportunity to develop their mathematical problem-solving skills. Second, we discussed the need to build on the high standard in reading by expanding pupils' access to a wider range of reading materials. Finally, we talked about the importance of continuously improving pupils' spelling to ensure that their writing is more accurate and mature.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, your leadership team and the governing body ensure that there is a strong culture of safeguarding in your school. You continue to ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and your approach to record-keeping is exemplary. The knowledge that you have about your pupils, coupled with the high standard of training that your staff receive, means that staff are well placed to spot signs and symptoms of abuse. As a result of this training, pupils are safe and stay safe.

Training is not just afforded to your staff. Very recently, you once again allowed pupils across the school to undertake workshops delivered by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. These workshops helped pupils to understand how to keep themselves safe in a world full of technology and online dangers. They also gained an age-appropriate understanding about the dangers of current issues, for example 'sexting', through the key theme of 'what's ok and what's not ok?' Parents also received high-quality literature from the day to support them in their role to keep their children safe.

Inspection findings

- You and your leadership team continue to do a lot of work to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the early years foundation stage. As a result, the standards children reach are now much better. There is a strong focus on modelling key vocabulary and building on what each pupil knows. Teachers also use questioning to great effect so that it promotes children's curiosity and inquisitiveness. As a result, learning is well structured, personalised and appropriately challenging. In a carefully planned session observed, children learned about different types of housing. Number was incorporated at every opportunity. Children then went outside to build different structures, showing enthusiasm and interest in their learning. They made good progress because they enjoyed taking part, listened attentively and learned new concepts.
- You have ensured that the school's curriculum is both dynamic and engaging. Your teachers' passion, flair and strong subject knowledge infuse high aspirations and expectations into your pupils. As a result of carefully planned cross-curricular projects, pupils are mature in thought and develop good knowledge in subjects other than reading, writing and mathematics. In history, for example, pupils can talk in depth about the Tudors and empathise with the context of that time. Pupils have a love of science and engineering. They are proud of their experiments and their inventions. They can link their learning to future study or employment. Added to this, pupils not only understand the scientific concepts being taught, but can apply that learning to other areas of the curriculum, for example in the weekly creative afternoon. You ensure that the curriculum fosters a love of entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity. This is because the wider curriculum promotes deep thinking and allows pupils to practise the skills that they have learned.
- Coupled with the highly effective curriculum is a personalised intervention and support programme, with one-to-one teaching before and after school. High-quality teaching, an engaging curriculum and the intervention and support

programme mean that now most pupils make good progress from the early years foundation stage through to key stage 2. They catch up and achieve as well as other pupils nationally.

- Your work to promote British values is also good. All pupils vote democratically each week on a current topic in their assembly. Pupils value this opportunity because it sparks discussion and debate. They also appreciate the opportunities you give them to extend their learning about more complex issues, for example ethics. When pupils studied animal classification, it was supplemented with an ethical debate on whether it is right to keep animals in cages. You also ensure that pupils have an understanding of different religions and that they know the importance of tolerance and respect for other faiths. Furthermore, you create opportunities for pupils to understand the different types of families that they may encounter in their lives. In discussion, pupils were adamant that families are built on love and that it does not matter if two people of the same sex are in a relationship, live together or marry.
- You and your staff ensure that pupils' reading skills are developed effectively. Pupils read a range of fiction and non-fiction texts for pleasure. Your one non-negotiable rule is that pupils must read every night at home. As a result, pupils achieve well in reading by the end of key stage 2 because, over time, they build up their skills and become proficient readers. They decode unfamiliar words confidently and work out the meanings of unfamiliar words by using clues from the sentence or paragraph in which they occur. Leaders, however, do not provide pupils with a sufficiently varied range of reading materials so that pupils are keen to read even more widely and more often.
- Your approach to teachers' ongoing development is effective. Teachers and governors unpick a weekly theme that is part of the school improvement plan. You ensure that there is a full debate about how best to achieve the improvement point. Teachers are encouraged to find best practice and to determine how best to meet pupils' needs.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils have access to a wider range of reading materials that enthuse and inspire them to read even more widely and often
- pupils' spelling continues to improve in accuracy
- they foster pupils' love of mathematics by developing further pupils' mathematical problem-solving skills.

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

Jonathan Smart
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the early years foundation stage leader, the special educational needs coordinator, parents of pupils from the school and members of the governing body. I had a telephone conversation with the chair of the governing body. Also, I met formally with a group of pupils from across the school and talked informally with others around the school and in lessons. I listened to pupils read. In addition, I jointly observed teaching and learning in key stage 1, key stage 2 and the early years foundation stage. I examined a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding, minutes of the governing body meetings, the school's own evaluation of how well it is doing, the school's improvement priorities, attendance information, a range of policies and the school's curricular information. I also undertook a review of the school's website. As part of the inspection, I considered 13 responses from parents to Ofsted's free text service, three responses to the Ofsted pupil questionnaire and four responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.