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22 February 2018

Miss Michelle Lauder  
Headteacher  
Laygate Community School  
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Dear Miss Lauder

### **Short inspection of Laygate Community School**

Following my visit to the school on 1 February 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 October 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 and your team set high academic expectations and show strong moral purpose in providing thorough standards of care for pupils. Your team has created a highly inclusive environment where every child is valued. You and your team provide stability and focus that help pupils to make very good progress, even for the significant proportion of pupils who arrive at school midway through a school year or key stage.

Teachers and teaching assistants cultivate positive attitudes to learning that support pupils in making good progress. Pupils work cooperatively with one another and show respectful attitudes to all members of the school community. You and your team have developed an atmosphere where pupils respect and celebrate difference in their rich and diverse school community.

You and your team have effectively addressed areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Over the past two years, pupils have achieved much higher outcomes at key stage 1. Pupils have achieved much better outcomes in writing and mathematics, with increasing proportions working at greater depth. You evaluate the school's effectiveness in a clear and accurate manner and have established rigorous systems to continually check the quality of teaching and the rates of pupils' progress. It is clear that you and your team know your pupils extremely well and many of the organisational systems that lie behind your work are exceptional. You and your team continue to develop sharp improvement plans that underpin improvement. Your teaching team and members of the governing body have a keen

understanding of school priorities and meet regularly to check on progress towards meeting them. In class and in meetings, pupils talked perceptively about the impact of new reading initiatives.

You have developed wider leadership and established strong systems that have maintained stability and a swift pace of improvement. Middle leaders are instrumental in monitoring standards, evaluating progress and leading improvement. New appointments have had a demonstrable effect in raising standards, as reflected in the higher standards now achieved at key stage 1 and the strong progress pupils make in mathematics across the school. Your associate deputy headteacher has provided continuity of provision amid a period of change. You have sustained high morale among your team, whose members thrive on the challenges they face. Middle leaders for literacy and numeracy show a clear awareness of areas for improvement. They analyse performance meticulously and drill down to develop precise awareness of how classroom practice can be changed to improve performance.

Leaders provide extensive support for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Your team diagnoses pupils' needs thoroughly and puts well-considered support in place. Your team meets regularly with parents to review the effect of support. You have developed strong relationships with additional specialists to complement your team's own expertise, particularly to support pupils' communication and language needs and their social and emotional development. These processes help pupils to make good progress.

The work of your team to support the personal development and welfare of your pupils is exceptional. Pupils talked eloquently of how yoga helps them to relax and control their emotions. A number of your staff are trained in additional forms of therapy to support pupils in managing their behaviour and emotions. You have commissioned extensive support to help the pupils who speak English as an additional language (up to 29 different languages are spoken at the school), many of whom make rapid progress. Your care team meets regularly to check on the progress and the welfare of your most vulnerable pupils, many of whom have complex needs. Your team maintains excellent links with social care, counselling support, and social, emotional and behavioural support teams to ensure that the right support is in place for pupils.

You and your team have responded with increasing success to the demands of the revised national curriculum. In 2017, pupils made outstanding progress in writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2. Pupils' progress in reading was also positive but less significantly so. At key stages 1 and 2, pupils achieved standards that were largely in line with those of other pupils nationally. This represented very strong progress from their starting points, which in many cases were well below those seen nationally. Current pupils are continuing to make good progress from their starting points. Increasing proportions of pupils are beginning to work at greater depth of understanding, although this is not consistent across all year groups and improving this is an important next step. Individual case studies show how, as a result of effective teaching and support, pupils make rapid progress. In

some cases, pupils who arrived at school with little or no English made significant progress in a very short space of time.

Governors are committed to the ethos of the school. They used a review of their practice to refine their roles and develop clear systems to hold leaders to account. The chair and vice-chair of the governing body are regular visitors to the school. Governors use their skills and expertise to check particular areas, such as the effect of additional funding. They carry out regular checks on the effectiveness of safeguarding practice at the school through regular audits. They have a keen awareness of the strengths and areas of responsibility and provide an effective balance of support and challenge for school leaders. Governors use the objective views of the local authority improvement partner to provide additional checks on school performance.

### **Safeguarding is effective**

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You and your team are committed to securing extremely high standards of care and support. School leaders and members of the governing body check the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures through regular audits of practice. Leaders make assiduous checks on the suitability of adults working at the school and are suitably trained in safer recruitment. Leaders ensure that staff receive up-to-date training on safeguarding issues. The headteacher pursues any concerns over pupils' welfare in an exemplary manner to ensure that the children in her care are safe. She records these referrals assiduously.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They say that bullying is extremely rare and that staff are highly effective in addressing any potential instances of bullying. Leaders take thorough actions to make pupils aware of potential risks and how to minimise them. Pupils were able to discuss the actions they could take to remain safe, for example the actions needed to stay safe online. Intensive support is provided to support pupils' social and emotional well-being and excellent links are maintained with the police, healthcare professionals and external partners to develop pupils' awareness of safety.

### **Inspection findings**

- You and your team are developing a range of initiatives to improve pupils' progress in reading. Pupils talked eloquently about new strategies to develop their inference and clarification skills and their understanding of vocabulary. In Year 6, pupils reflected perceptively on extracts from their class novel and discussed what these extracts revealed about character and theme. Your team is creating a distinct focus on reading. These approaches are increasing pupils' engagement and helping them to make better progress. However, these developments remain at an early stage and progress in reading is still not as strong as in writing and mathematics.
- You and your deputy headteacher have led and sustained significant improvements in pupils' outcomes at key stage 1. This process intensified in

2017, with pupils achieving outcomes that were in line with or above those seen nationally. This represented strong progress from their starting points. Pupils continue to make improving progress at key stage 1. Regular checks on the quality of teaching and pupils' progress are helping leaders to maintain these higher standards.

- Leaders have improved provision in early years and achieved a marked increase in the proportion of children reaching a good level of development over the past two years. The Nursery provision provides a rich and supportive environment where teaching is matched well to meet children's needs. While children are making improving progress in the Reception class, learning in the indoor and outdoor environments is not as fully enhanced and not as consistently pitched to meet children's needs.
- You and your inclusion team have successfully raised the profile of attendance. Pupils are genuinely motivated by new reward schemes to encourage them to be punctual and to attend regularly. Leaders have developed stronger support for families and also challenged parents where necessary. As a result, attendance has improved over the last 18 months and is now at a level that is in line with that seen nationally. In contrast to this success, you experienced a spike in exclusions in 2016/17 that was not representative of the school's inclusive ethos. These have now significantly reduced.
- Your team has led significant improvements in the teaching of mathematics, encouraging teachers to address more challenging material on a consistent basis. The weekly geometry sessions are encouraging pupils to embrace more difficult topics at an earlier stage. Your team ensures that pupils are regularly encouraged to apply their problem-solving skills and reflect upon their use of different mathematical methods. This is helping pupils to continue to make good progress and reach higher levels of attainment.
- Pupils made outstanding progress in writing at the end of key stage 2 in 2017. Work in books shows that pupils have many opportunities to develop their writing stamina, with opportunities to write for a range of audiences and purposes. While progress for some pupils who speak English as an additional language is initially slower, this rapidly accelerates once key skills have been nurtured.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they enhance the learning environment and learning routines in the Reception class to support children in making consistently good progress
- they embed new approaches to reading, so that the sustained and substantial progress pupils have made in writing and mathematics is replicated in their reading
- teachers build upon recent improvements in the quality of teaching at key stages 1 and 2 so that increasing proportions of pupils work at a greater depth of understanding.

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

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Kirtley  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

As part of the inspection, I explored the actions taken by leaders to accelerate pupils' progress in reading and in early years. I also looked at the actions that leaders were taking to continue to raise standards at key stage 1 and to maintain strong progress in writing and mathematics. Furthermore, I explored whether leaders were improving rates of attendance.

During the inspection, I met with you, and senior and middle leaders. I also spoke to four members of the governing body, including the chair and vice-chair. I held a meeting with a group of pupils and talked to pupils less formally in lessons. I also talked to the school improvement partner from the local authority. I looked at learning in lessons with you. I also looked at pupils' work in books and folders. I examined the school improvement plan as well as other documents, including the school's self-evaluation, assessment information, behaviour and attendance information and pupil tracking. I examined safeguarding documents, including the single central record. At the time of the inspection, too few responses were made to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire to produce a report. I did receive three parent free-text responses and nine responses to the staff questionnaire, and these were taken into account.