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Mrs C Tickner  
Headteacher  
Lowther Endowed School  
Hackthorpe  
Penrith  
Cumbria  
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Dear Mrs Tickner

### **Short inspection of Lowther Endowed School**

Following my visit to the school on 9 October 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 November 2013.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection, despite recent significant changes to staffing. Staff are united behind your vision for the school. This is testament to the strength and capacity to improve that you have established within the school. Staff are supportive of each other and work with common purpose. All the staff who responded to the survey issued during the inspection agree that they are proud to be members of the school.

Governors and external advisers support the school well. Governors bring a broad range of skills and experience to bear on their work. They are not afraid to have challenging conversations with you and hold leaders to account, but are also a source of encouragement during difficult times. The local authority has a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. It provides appropriate support, including the use of associate school improvement advisers. The local authority had concerns about the school due to past staffing issues. Advisers are confident that new leaders have taken effective action to address the prior weaknesses. Evidence gathered during the inspection supports this view.

The school has a very nurturing and caring feel, and the small number of pupils means that the children feel part of a family setting. All the pupils I spoke to would recommend the school. Pupils I spoke to stated that, 'our learning is always improving,' and commented on how the development of the school's outdoor facilities and playground has improved the school environment.

At the last inspection, senior leaders were asked to develop the role of subject

leaders. Working together with yourself, subject leaders are encouraged to use their initiative and contribute their ideas. Subject leaders' improved monitoring of what is happening in their subjects now ensures that planning, resourcing, teaching and assessment meet the demands of the new curriculum. Leaders were also asked to improve the challenge in lessons. You made significant changes to assessment systems across the school. Teachers now make sure that all staff have access to the most recent assessment information to inform their planning. You and your staff know all pupils well and teachers set tasks that are pitched appropriately to pupils' abilities and, regardless of starting points, encourage pupils to aim high. We saw many examples across the school of staff using questioning to develop and extend pupils' learning.

During the inspection, we discussed the next steps required to enable the school to improve further. Work in pupils' books and your own evaluation accurately highlight that further work is required to embed the recent improvements in writing. Additionally, the computing curriculum is not as strong as other subjects.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You, as the designated safeguarding lead, have been trained appropriately in child protection. The safeguarding governor meets regularly with you to discuss safeguarding issues and to ensure that policies are up to date. You give safeguarding a high priority and a strong safeguarding culture runs throughout the school. Checks to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children are up to date and comprehensive. Designated staff and relevant governors receive training in safer recruitment to ensure that adults who apply to join the school are suitable to work with children.

You ensure that staff receive relevant training in, for example, recognising signs of abuse. You and governors promote the clear message that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

Pupils say that they feel safe and well cared for in the school. They feel confident that adults will help them if needed. Pupils understand the risks of using technology and readily told me the rules they use to keep themselves safe when online.

### **Inspection findings**

- We agreed several areas of enquiry for this inspection. The first of these was the effectiveness of actions taken by leaders to improve outcomes across early years. Strong leadership enhances the early years provision. This ensures that children experience a wide range of activities daily to build on their skills, development and knowledge. The deployment of well-informed support staff and the provision of activities that engage and motivate children contribute well to children's good progress. For example, children were excited about the work relating to a 'bear hunt', and were fully enthralled in hunting for bears in the school's outdoor area. The activities were linked to a book that children had been reading and effectively

built on their prior learning. Adults use questions well to support children's thinking and develop their ideas about the language used. The indoor learning zones offer a very rich range of engaging and stimulating learning opportunities, while effective use of the outdoor learning environment results in literacy, number and social skills development. As a result, children make good progress. The percentage achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception in 2018 increased significantly.

- The next area we looked at was the effectiveness of actions taken by leaders to improve outcomes in phonics. Leaders have established a consistent and effective system for the teaching of phonics. This is proving successful. Pupils enjoy their learning, and attainment in phonics is rising. Pupils in key stage 1 use their phonics skills to read and write new words accurately, such as when writing instructions for a recipe. New resources have been created to ensure that the sounds learned by pupils in school can be practised at home. Teachers plan daily phonics lessons to match pupils' needs. Pupils read regularly to adults, practising their skills. As a result, pupils make good progress in reading from their varied starting points.
- We also looked at the effectiveness of actions to improve outcomes in writing. Leaders ensure that teachers use prior assessment information to plan work effectively for pupils. Through pupil progress meetings, you have raised teachers' knowledge of age-related expectations in writing. This is beginning to help teachers to understand the skills pupils require to improve their progress. Visits across lessons quickly confirmed improvements to teaching across the school. For example, pupils in key stage 2 created character descriptions that were well structured. Teachers provide opportunities for pupils to practise writing in subjects other than English. These included writing reports about the categorisation of organisms in science in key stage 2, and the Great Fire of London in key stage 1. The focus on spelling, handwriting and extended writing is beginning to have a positive effect on the progress of current pupils. However, the work is not fully embedded, and leaders have plans to sustain the effective work that has taken place over the last year to improve the progress of current pupils, especially in key stage 2.
- Another line of enquiry for the inspection was to see how effectively teachers challenge pupils across the curriculum. The work of pupils shows that they study a range of subjects, including humanities, arts and science, in depth. Pupils build skills, knowledge and understanding progressively. Enrichment days, the variety of clubs and trips and the school's focus on outdoor learning are highly valued by pupils and parents and carers. Pupils of different abilities are challenged to think deeply because they are set interesting, topical tasks. Pupils say that you and your teachers have been successful in making learning enjoyable and exciting. We observed part of the pupils' 'Stone Age day'. This fully engaged the imagination of the pupils. It resulted in good-quality work, deepening pupils' knowledge of history and developing their historical skills. As a result, pupils are making good progress in a range of subjects. They are acquiring the appropriate knowledge, skills and understanding. However, leaders recognise that the computing curriculum is not as developed as the other subjects. This is because leaders have only recently invested in equipment to enhance the learning in this subject.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they embed the strategies in place to improve pupils' achievement in writing and secure sustained, strong progress
- the computing curriculum is developed to the same high standard as other subjects.

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

Simon Hunter  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I spoke with pupils, both formally and informally, about their work and school life. I held meetings with you and I also spoke with staff to discuss improvements in their areas of responsibility. Together we looked at learning in pupils' books. I also spoke with an adviser from the local authority.

I reviewed documentation, which included your evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for improvement, and the school development plan. I considered 25 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, 20 responses to the pupil online survey and eight to the staff online survey.

I visited classes with you to observe pupils' learning. I met with governors to discuss aspects of school leadership and management. I reviewed a range of documentation about safeguarding, including the school's record of checks undertaken on newly appointed staff.