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Mrs Anne Richardson  
Headteacher  
St Michael's Nursery and Infant School  
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Cumbria  
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Dear Mrs Richardson

### **Short inspection of St Michael's Nursery and Infant School**

Following my visit to the school on 12 June 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 January 2015.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school is a safe and welcoming environment. Your evaluation of the school's effectiveness is accurate. The school development plan sets out relevant improvement priorities. All staff who responded to the staff survey said that they felt empowered to carry out their work with the support of school leaders.

You have worked with the staff to develop a strong culture for learning across the school. You encourage pupils to reflect on their learning behaviours. For example, pupils know what it means to be resourceful, a problem solver or a good team member. Pupils' good behaviour is a strength of the school. You have invested in creating a well-being room to meet the varied needs of pupils. Positive behaviours are celebrated each week, where some pupils are designated as 'Rays of sunshine'.

Many children enter the Nursery Class with skills lower than those typical for their age. By the end of the Reception Year, children make good progress. The proportion of children who leave the early years with a good level of development has been in line with the national average for several years. Pupils' outcomes in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1 have remained in line with the national averages. Attainment in English and mathematics at the end of key stage 1 has been in line with that of other pupils nationally. Work in pupils' books and school assessment information indicate that current pupils are making good progress in English, mathematics and across the wider curriculum.

Pupils arrive calmly for school each morning, where they are greeted by staff. Classrooms are full of colourful displays celebrating pupils' work. Leaders have planned an exciting and vibrant curriculum, full of many experiences that prepare pupils well for life in modern Britain. For example, pupils recently celebrated the end of Ramadan. They have also celebrated Chinese New Year and St George's Day. Pupils have engaged in a wide range of fund-raising endeavours and were invited to attend the announcement that a local rugby league football club had been successful in their bid to bring the Rugby League World Cup to Cumbria.

Pupils are friendly and inquisitive. They behave well in lessons and while moving around school. At breaktimes, they play well with their friends. Pupils told me that name-calling and bullying are rare. They said that pupils were nice to one another. Older pupils support the younger children at playtimes. A group of Year 2 pupils were teaching children from the Reception class to walk on stilts during lunchtime.

Parents and carers are very positive in their views of the school. Those that I spoke to before school only wished that their children could stay in the school for a longer time, rather than having to transfer to a new school at the end of Year 2. Parents were complimentary about the staff. Parents were happy that their children were safe and well cared for by the staff.

Governors have a well-developed understanding of the many strengths of the school and where further improvements are needed. They have ensured that the pupil premium funding has been well managed to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Clear oversight of the use of the sport premium has ensured that pupils have benefited from a wide range of sporting experiences. These include football, tennis, dodgeball and wheelchair basketball, as well as other outdoor and adventurous activities.

At the previous inspection, school leaders were asked to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes in writing. You have considered the varied needs of pupils as part of the writing process. For example, pupils are taught correct pencil grips as part of their fine motor development. Staff have received training in the delivery of the teaching of writing. You encourage pupils to talk about their writing by engaging in discussions and planning before starting a writing task. From an early age, children have many purposeful opportunities to write. For example, in the Reception class, children discuss the menus in the cafe role-play area. They apply their phonics and spelling skills to write down orders as they assume the roles of waiter and waitress. This work builds upon simple mark-making that quickly develops into the formation of grammatically accurate sentences over time. As pupils move through the school, writing opportunities are interesting and engaging for the pupils. For example, pupils in Year 2 have written about Antarctica and Australia and made up recipes for a special family.

Leaders were also asked to develop more opportunities for children to reinforce their phonics skills. You have developed the teaching of phonics further since the previous inspection. Children in the early years and pupils in key stage 1 receive teaching that is appropriate to their needs and abilities. All staff have received

relevant and up-to-date training. The leader for English makes regular checks on the quality of the delivery of phonics sessions. The application of phonics is evident in activities in classrooms and in the outdoor learning environment. Reading is promoted effectively across the school. Carefully placed worded prompts encourage children to sound out and write new and tricky words. Children in the Nursery move from picture books to simple books with repetitive spelling patterns as they grow in confidence. The pronunciation of children's spoken language is grammatically accurate.

The final area that inspectors asked you to consider was how you could develop links with parents. You have worked successfully over time to ensure that punctuality is good. You engage regularly with parents to ensure that they are well informed about how to best support their children. You have engaged with parents successfully, enabling them to be part of a recent science and art project about the life of a whale. You, and members of staff, visit children in their homes prior to attending Nursery. Regular meetings throughout the year keep parents informed about the curriculum, assessments and school trips. Prominent notice boards and an up-to-date website ensure that parents have access to high-quality, relevant information. You have created a positive culture that encourages open dialogue between staff and parents.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

As the designated safeguarding leader, you have ensured that all arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils are effective. Staff have received relevant training in safeguarding basic awareness, as well as 'Prevent' duty training, to enable them to spot signs of potential radicalisation. You have received enhanced training in this area. You, along with one governor, have received training in safer recruitment.

You make careful checks on the suitability of adults who work in school. Records of your work to safeguard children are thorough. You are vigilant and dogged in your determination to ensure that vulnerable pupils and their families receive timely and relevant support. Members of staff that I spoke to are aware of their responsibilities and remain alert in their duties. You engage effectively with several services, including the police, children's social care, social housing and several national charities.

### **Inspection findings**

- During this inspection, I focused on three lines of enquiry. The first of these related to mathematics. Leaders have considered their approach to the teaching of mathematics carefully since the previous inspection. Although pupils' outcomes at the end of Year 2 have been good in mathematics, they have been stronger in reading and writing. Teachers plan mathematics to build on prior learning well; they use effective questions in lessons to move learning on. Pupils apply their skills well to show their understanding and deeper reasoning. For example, pupils in Year 2 were able to carefully consider the differences in a circle and a sphere while discussing the dimension of depth. You embarked on a new approach to the teaching of mathematics. However, after 18 months, you reflected on your

efforts and found that it was not having enough impact on pupils' outcomes. Teachers have engaged in training with a local mathematics hub. They have engaged in activities with teachers from partner schools to quality assure assessments. Despite these efforts, leaders have not looked closely at work in pupils' books to check if the quality of teaching and learning over time is enabling the progress of which they are capable.

- The second area that I looked at related to attendance. For three out of the past four years, attendance has been just below the national average. You are taking effective action to ensure that attendance does not fall further. You are proactive in following up absences. You are currently engaged with a number of partner agencies to support vulnerable pupils and their families in ensuring that they attend school regularly. You promote attendance well through assemblies and regular newsletters. You keep careful logs of the pupils whose attendance is poorest and what work you are doing to provide support. However, despite your many positive efforts, attendance remains lower than the national average.
- The final area that I looked at related to leaders' efforts to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). You are the leader for SEND, and in this role, you have ensured that pupils at St Michael's get off to a good start. The needs of children are quickly assessed when they enter the Nursery Year. Where additional needs are identified, you ensure that plans are put in place so that children receive relevant support from the school and external agencies. You work in close partnership with the educational psychology services, occupational health, speech and language support and the disabilities learning nurse. You keep careful checks on the support that these pupils receive in school. From looking at assessment information for these pupils and the work in their books, I could see that pupils with SEND make good progress in relation to their individual targets.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school continues with its positive efforts to make sure that attendance improves
- they make better checks on the quality of work in pupils' mathematics books, making sure that the quality of teaching and learning over time is enabling pupils to make the best possible progress.

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

John Donald  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

With you, I carried out visits to each class. I scrutinised a wide range of school documentation, including the school improvement plan and school self-evaluation. I also looked at pupil performance information.

I examined the school's single central safeguarding record and records of staff training. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority and met with six members of the governing body, including the chair of governors.

I spoke to parents before school and considered the one free-text response. I considered the eight responses to the staff survey and the 18 responses to the pupil survey. I spoke to pupils informally during their lunch break.