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Mr Andrew Hudson
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Dear Mr Hudson

Short inspection of Mickley First School

Following my visit to the school on 4 July 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 July 2013.

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 governors have tackled the previous inspection report's recommendations successfully. You have embedded a warm, welcoming ethos where 'can-do' attitudes prevail and a distinctively inclusive feel is tangible. Pupils are your driving force; they remain central to your efforts. Your leadership enables and empowers others; you model high expectations effectively. Pupils and staff feel compelled to give of their best. Parents have positive opinions of the staff and they value your visibility and approachability. Describing Mickley First School as 'a small school with big ambitions' where children 'blossom', parents are confident that their children are safe, happy and making good progress.

The previous inspection challenged you to improve subject leaders' understanding of the quality of teaching and learning within their areas of responsibility. You responded diligently. Together with subject leaders, you created a system that captures pupils' attainment in all statutory subjects each term. Several teachers benefited from internal and external training as well as additional support from local authority subject specialists. Their confidence, leadership skills and subject knowledge improved. Enthusiastic subject leaders now manage subjects across the curriculum, from English and mathematics to geography, art and beyond. They examine pupils' work and meet with staff from other schools to share good practices. They are also more proactive in seeking opportunities to get into classes to see teaching and learning in action for themselves. This is giving each leader a

more precise and rounded view of the effectiveness of their work. They report their findings on the quality of teaching and learning to you and governors. Consequently, you are aware, for example, that some pupils in each key stage need further challenge and opportunities to apply their mathematical thinking and reasoning to increasingly complex problems.

Staff and governors have regular access to good-quality training and professional development. Senior leaders monitor the work of teachers and teaching assistants systematically and take action to develop and improve all adults' subject knowledge and teaching skills. Most pupils make good or better progress from their different starting points due to effective teaching. Pupils' outcomes are good and improving across key stages and subjects. Leaders' and governors' evaluations of improvement plans, however, are not always as sharp as they might be to ensure that the correct priorities have central focus. At times, details, for example those concerning pupil groups and specific time frames, are missing.

You aim to equip all pupils with the skills needed to read and write from an early age. Staff are mindful that the essential life skill of reading is integral to pupils' progress across all subjects. Your well-stocked library and literacy-rich environment foster a love of reading among all groups of pupils, including boys. Adults are skilled in their delivery and approach to the teaching of phonics, making sure that they enunciate sounds carefully and are supporting pupils to do so too. Leaders and staff track the progress of individuals who enter school with particular weaknesses in speech, communication and language carefully. Pupils who fall behind have one-to-one or small-group additional support, which usually helps them to catch up quickly. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress.

Pupils' progress and outcomes in English in each key stage are good. In 2016, for example, the proportions of pupils in key stage 1 reaching expected standards and greater depths of learning in reading and writing were better than national averages. At times, however, adults accept handwriting and presentation from pupils that are of poor or inconsistent quality. Furthermore, adults do not always offer early years children sufficient challenge in reading and writing, particularly within children's independent learning tasks and opportunities.

Pupils' attendance has improved due to leaders' and managers' effective actions. Following a dip in 2016, you supported and challenged parents to understand the effect that absence can have on their children's academic progress and their personal, social and emotional development. Consequently, no pupils are hindered by frequent absence this year. The overall rate of attendance is currently 96.3% which is broadly typical of schools nationally.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have created a safe environment by making sure that communication between home and school is reliable and daily safeguarding procedures are robust. You use the most recent guidance to inform child protection policies and insist that the principles are translated into practice. You and governors follow safer

recruitment principles carefully, checking adults' identification and suitability to work with children prior to making appointments. Staff are vigilant and trained to spot signs of harm or potential vulnerabilities in pupils. You and teachers make yourselves visible and available for parents and pupils if they need to talk or have any concerns. Staff work closely with other agencies and external experts to ensure that pupils' and families' needs are met effectively. Parents agree that their children feel 'safe and well looked after'.

Inspection findings

- Most children enter the early years with skills and abilities that are broadly typical of those expected for their age. Warm, caring adults meet children's emotional and welfare needs effectively. Staff communicate well with parents and other agencies to ensure that each individual's needs are catered for appropriately. Teachers shape tasks and create specific areas across the early years that excite and engage children in their learning. Children are happy and get along well together because of the positive and mutually respectful relationships that abound. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the time they leave the Reception class has grown year-on-year. Most children are ready for the challenges of Year 1. Nonetheless, staff sometimes set 'challenge tasks' for children during child-initiated learning sessions that are not reliably challenging, particularly in reading and writing. Adults' expectations are not always clear and understood well enough by children to enable them to persevere and tackle tasks appropriately.
- Governors demonstrate a commitment to their own training and development. They are taking increasing advantage of training, both online and via the local authority's governor services. Several have increased the level and frequency of their involvement, coming into school more regularly to conduct monitoring visits, meeting with staff and looking at pupils' work first-hand. This is enabling governors to provide increased challenge and support to leaders. Governors' depth of understanding of the impact of funding for pupil premium pupils and for those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has developed well this year and is now more secure. This means that money is targeted ever more carefully and successfully to secure the best possible outcomes for these groups.
- Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge across subjects. They use subject-specific terminology and ensure that pupils understand increasingly complex vocabulary. Staff usually make learning intentions clear to pupils, using succinct explanations and asking questions skilfully to encourage pupils to think deeply about their learning. In key stage 1, in 2016, pupils' outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics at the expected standard and at greater depths of learning were above national averages. The large majority of current pupils are making good progress in most subjects. Staff, however, are inconsistent in their response to poorly presented handwriting and work from pupils. This means that the quality of some pupils' work varies from subject to subject.
- Pupils behave well in and outside of classrooms. They visibly enjoy the time spent in school. In each key stage, pupils demonstrate good attitudes to learning.

They enjoy mathematics and are interested and motivated by the structured learning opportunities. All pupils build a bank of number facts over time, which supports their mathematical fluency. Teachers identify misconceptions and support pupils effectively as pupils grapple with new concepts or calculation methods. At times, however, teachers do not factor sufficient challenge into their planning. This means that some pupils have too few opportunities to really get their teeth into demanding mathematical work which implores them to think deeply and reason logically.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- detailed school improvement plans include specific aims for key pupil groups, have clear time frames and are evaluated for impact thoroughly
- pupils have sufficient opportunities to apply their mathematical reasoning and logic to increasingly complex problems
- staff have consistently high expectations of pupils' handwriting and presentation across subjects
- children in the early years have greater challenge in reading and writing, particularly during their independent work and play.

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

Yours sincerely

Fiona Manuel
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, a group of governors, including the chair and the vice-chair of the governing body, a representative from the local authority and subject leaders. I conducted observations of teaching and learning in all year groups jointly with you and looked at pupils' work in books and during lessons. I listened to pupils and children in the early years reading. I examined a wide range of documentation, including policies, the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans as well as safeguarding information. I took account of 39 free-text messages from parents and 57 parental responses on Ofsted's Parent View. I also spoke with a group of parents at the start of the school day. There were no survey responses from staff or pupils.