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Mr Christopher Minikin
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Minikin

Short inspection of Montalbo Nursery & Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 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 April 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

You have accelerated the pace of improvement since the last inspection. You have worked with your team to develop their expertise through effective training and coaching and maintained a sustained focus on the quality of teaching. You have also developed a highly stimulating curriculum, where pupils access a rich store of knowledge and skills, enhanced by a wide range of additional experiences. As a result of this work, the school provides an inspiring learning environment where pupils make strong and improving progress.

Your team have responded purposefully to the challenges and opportunities of the national curriculum. In 2018, the proportion of pupils reaching and exceeding expected standards at key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics was well above that seen nationally. Pupils made good progress at key stage 1, with outcomes in early years also showing a strong trajectory of improvement. This success has not come at the expense of pupils' achievements in the wider curriculum. There is evidence that pupils acquire considerable subject knowledge in subjects such as science and history. Pupils' workbooks show that these high

standards of achievement across year groups and subjects are continuing for current pupils.

You have expanded your leadership team and given middle leaders increasing responsibility for curriculum development. They have a stronger role in developing new initiatives and checking the effects of change. You recognise that a number of colleagues are new to aspects of subject leadership. You also correctly identify that your recent move from mixed to single year classes has placed additional demands on curriculum planning. You have therefore ensured that colleagues benefit from regular access to training and partnership work. This helps them to maintain awareness of curriculum developments. You have established a community of teachers who are keen to share good practice and embrace new initiatives. It was refreshing to talk to those teachers newer to the profession. Their enthusiasm for teaching has been reaffirmed by the high-quality professional development and support that they have received over the past year.

The development of your team has been underpinned by strong systems to check pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. You welcome external scrutiny from the local authority to objectively check the quality of education, the accuracy of assessment and pupils' welfare. Leaders closely monitor the effect of support on the progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). In addition, the expertise of teachers and teaching assistants has been developed so that they can meet the needs of pupils with SEND more effectively. You use pupil premium funding effectively to deliver additional support for disadvantaged pupils and to provide access to trips and visits that build their self-esteem. This combination of enhanced leadership, stronger monitoring systems and consistently high-quality teaching provides significant capacity for further improvement. Your team has convincingly addressed areas for improvement identified in the last inspection, as reflected in higher standards of handwriting and the guidance pupils receive on how to improve their work.

You have developed a distinctive emphasis on the wider curriculum. You have created a range of links with local businesses, charities and educational institutions to enhance pupils' engagement with the wider community. Pupils develop their self-confidence and communication skills through regular engagement with parents, local businesses, politicians and universities. Your curriculum has a focus upon the history and continuing development of the local area. This thread weaves its way through many subjects and activities. These activities are part of a wider commitment to promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils show a respect for others and respect the right to be different. However, some of your work to raise awareness of equalities is not as clearly mapped out as other work.

Your staff, at all levels, develop extremely positive relationships with pupils. Pupils are keen and attentive listeners who demonstrate a tangible enthusiasm for learning. Pupils behave very well and work effectively alongside one another and are keen to discuss their learning and articulate their views in class. Pupils value their education, and this is reflected in their high rates of attendance.

The continual journey of improvements is reflected in the increasing popularity of the school. Pupil numbers have increased significantly over the past three years, with more pupils joining at different times of the year. The school has progressed from mixed-year-group classes to single-year-group classes in all years. The planned admission number is scheduled to double from September 2019. You have an active parent support group. Their work has significantly enhanced the school environment and developed valuable links with external businesses and organisations. All the parents who responded to the parental questionnaire would recommend the school to others. Several parents wrote or telephoned to personally inform the inspector of the transformative effect school staff had made on the welfare and progress of their children.

Your governors share your commitment to the school and the wider community. They are appreciative of the significant improvements that have been made in recent years and are keen that these should continue. They demonstrate a strong understanding of many aspects of the school's work and are aware of the effects of additional funding. They have the knowledge and expertise to provide effective support and challenge. They have worked with local authority partners to gain objective insight into performance management processes. You provide governors with regular updates on pupils' progress and they test this out in their regular visits to the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You ensure that members of your leadership team have enhanced safeguarding training. You provide thorough training and ongoing guidance to all members of staff, who show a sharp awareness of safeguarding policies and procedures. You commission regular audits of safeguarding practice to ensure that practice is up to date. Governors receive regular briefings on safeguarding issues. Leaders make thorough checks on the suitability of adults working at the school. Staff show a good awareness of the actions they should take if they have any concerns over pupils' welfare. Throughout the school, there is a strong emphasis upon pupils' welfare and safety.

Pupils spoken with, and those who responded to the pupil questionnaire, say that they feel safe in school and their parents and carers agree. They say that bullying is extremely rare, and that staff are effective in addressing any potential instances of bullying. Pupils were able to discuss the actions they could take to remain safe, for example the actions needed to stay safe online. You raise parents' awareness of safeguarding issues through specific events such as online safety meetings and by giving safeguarding a prominent position on the school website.

Inspection findings

- I explored the progress that pupils made in reading at key stage 2. In 2018, almost all pupils achieved expected standards in reading and over 40% achieved higher standards of attainment. Despite this, published information raised some

questions over whether progress remained strong. In listening to pupils read in class, and, in reviewing their work, it was clear that standards of reading are high. Teachers develop pupils' skills of inference and deduction effectively and many pupils show a highly perceptive understanding of the books they read. In Year 6, pupils are given access to texts that deal with important subjects, such as the Holocaust or the rights of women. Pupils respond to these texts with sensitivity and insight. In class, pupils can support their views on characters and themes with clear references to textual evidence. Teachers have developed a strong reading culture at the school and pupils make very good progress in their reading.

- In 2018, the proportion of pupils exceeding expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics was above that seen nationally at key stage 2. This pattern was repeated in key stage 1 and in the early years. A review of books and folders showed that high standards are being sustained. In mathematics, pupils are given regular opportunities to apply their reasoning to complex problems. In English and across a wide variety of curriculum subjects pupils write with fluency across a range of genres. On occasions, boys' writing is not as strong as the extremely high standards of many of the girls.
- Pupils make good progress from their starting points at key stage 1. In recent years, the proportion of pupils achieving greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics has increased. Teachers have high expectations and there is much evidence that pupils make good progress from their starting points. In Year 1, pupils were seen keenly watching a dramatic performance of a poem. They considered what constituted a successful performance, before rehearsing and performing their own extracts, with clarity and expression. In books, there is evidence that pupils are making good progress over time in English and mathematics and in their science and topic books. Although boys' progress in writing is not always as strong as that of the girls, they nevertheless make strong progress from their starting points.
- Children in the Nursery and Reception classes make extremely strong progress. Teachers and teaching assistants show a keen awareness of children's interests and abilities. They plan learning and play carefully to support children's social and academic development. In Nursery class, children concentrated as they practised their sounds and recognised letters. They then transitioned to continuous play in a rich environment that prompted their curiosity and interest. Children were happy and settled because of the supportive environment and the stimulating opportunities to play and learn together.
- The high quality of teaching in the early years was reflected in the extremely strong progress evident in children's books and journals. In Reception class, books showed good progress in phonics, handwriting and number work. Individual folders showed strong evidence of children's wider development in areas such as their moving and handling skills and their knowledge about the world. The individual learning journals in Nursery and Reception class show that pupils access a wide range of exciting learning opportunities that support their development across many areas of learning. These journals are annotated assiduously by teachers to show how activities support children's learning and development. School information shows that over a third of children are

exceeding their early learning goals and work in books and folders confirms this very strong picture of progress.

- Leaders and teachers provide pupils with comprehensive access to a curriculum rich in knowledge that is enhanced by wider experiences and partnerships. In science, pupils explore topics such as fitness and exercise, the properties of materials, and global warming in stimulating ways. They pursue their studies through regular experiments, such as exploring whether light travels in straight lines or by watching seeds and plants grow in the school's own polytunnel. Pupils develop knowledge of important scientific ideas, such as the concept of a fair test. The quality of work in pupils' science books is extremely strong, with many pupils motivated to write at length on their experiments and scientific interests.
- The strong picture in science is replicated in history. Pupils acquire knowledge of different historical periods and develop an understanding of historical sources. Leaders ensure that pupils develop an interest in the history of their own area, which gives the curriculum added relevance. In a number of year groups, pupils produce their own historical guides to local landmarks, such as the Bowes Museum. These are often professionally published to create a permanent record of their research and study. The quality of writing in topic books is high, with pupils encouraged to explore topics in great detail.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they further reduce any remaining differences in the quality of writing between boys and girls
- they continue to support new subject leaders in their curriculum planning
- they further enhance the promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development by mapping out how different equalities will be addressed.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Durham. 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 pupils' progress in reading and standards of attainment across the school. I also investigated the progress pupils were making at key stage 1 and in the early years foundation stage. I considered the quality of the

wider curriculum and how well leaders have dealt with areas for improvement from the previous inspection.

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher and three newly qualified teachers. I also met five members of the governing body, including the vice-chair. I held a meeting with a group of pupils and discussed their learning with them in lessons. I also held a telephone conversation with the education development partner from the local authority. I looked, with you and your deputy headteacher, at learning in lessons. I also looked at a wide range of work in pupils' books and folders. I examined school improvement priorities and discussed pupils' progress. I looked at documents, including the school's self-evaluation, behaviour and attendance records, and local authority monitoring reports. I examined safeguarding documents, including the single central record. I considered 53 responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire and an email and a telephone call from parents. I also considered 16 responses to the pupil questionnaire and 16 responses to the staff questionnaire.