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Mrs Donna Stretton  
Headteacher  
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Cumbria  
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Dear Mrs Stretton

### **Short inspection of Sandside Lodge School**

Following my visit to the school on 12 September 2017 with Jon Ashley, Ofsted Inspector, 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 2013.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Over the past three years, there have been a number of changes at Sandside Lodge. You joined the school recently, following the retirement of the previous headteacher in April 2017. Two years ago, the deputy headteacher moved to a headship and a new deputy headteacher was appointed. A long-standing member of staff was promoted to assistant headteacher in 2014. The school is moving to a new building during the next academic year. In addition, the school has been identified by the local authority as the strategic lead for autism resource provision.

Staff, parents and the local authority agree that you have got off to a flying start since you joined Sandside Lodge. Already, you have got a deep understanding of the strengths and areas of improvement for the school. You are ably supported by the deputy and assistant headteachers, who share your ambitious vision for the school.

For many of your parents, the decision to move their child from their local school to Sandside Lodge, while one of their hardest, in hindsight has been one of their best. Your parents appreciate the hard work and commitment of you and your staff. They have absolute confidence that their children are happy, safe and well cared for. As one parent told inspectors, 'We could not have wished for a better school.'

Staff are proud to be a part of Sandside Lodge. Many of the team have worked at your school for a long time. In the short time you have been in the school, you have earned their trust and respect. You have wasted no time in giving everyone the

opportunity to contribute to the school's development. Both you and your predecessor have championed training and encouraged staff to pursue further qualifications. Consequently, you have a highly skilled team who are able to meet the diverse and complex needs of your pupils.

Sandside Lodge is a hive of activity. Teachers plan lessons carefully to ensure that tasks are purposeful and match the pupils' interests and enthusiasms. For example, during our visit, pupils were making cakes and mincemeat to sell at the Christmas Fair, preparing for the local canal festival and learning about how Jewish families celebrate Rosh Hashanah. From their very first days at Sandside Lodge, pupils 'blossom'. Pupils who joined the school just a few days ago are making friends, interacting with adults and taking part in lessons. Well-considered routines and procedures reduce pupils' anxiety and promote their self-confidence so that they are ready to learn.

At the previous inspection, inspectors asked governors to ensure that the pupil premium funding is clearly allocated to the pupils for whom it is intended. Governors keep a close eye on how money is apportioned for all eligible pupils. They make sure that school leaders keep them well informed about the progress of these pupils. You are now developing a more strategic approach. You have identified the common barriers to learning for this group of pupils. You make good use of this money to enable these pupils to access the wealth of enrichment opportunities offered by the school. Unforgettable experiences such as the ski trip provide these pupils with the chance to develop their independence skills, strengthen friendships and build their self-confidence. This stands them in good stead for their next steps, both at and beyond Sandside Lodge. Pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding now make similar progress to their peers. However, we talked about the need to ensure that improving the attendance of this group is a high priority.

Inspectors also asked leaders to ensure that teaching is consistently good or better to enable pupils to make at least good progress in every lesson. Your own evaluations testify to the impact of the training and support which has been put in place. Teachers plan lessons which engage and enthuse pupils. Teachers make excellent use of the local area to hook pupils into learning. You prioritise links with local partners to maximise opportunities to root learning in real life. Your teachers are highly adept at matching learning to the diverse and complex needs of the pupils in their classes. Teachers have high expectations of every pupil in their classes, accept no excuses and make sure that not a moment is wasted. In every lesson, your teachers skilfully thread reading, writing and mathematics through the activities. Pupils across the school make strong progress from their different starting points. Consequently, by the end of Year 14, pupils are well prepared for their next steps so that they all move on successfully to further education.

Since the previous inspection, the school has gone from strength to strength. You are highly ambitious for Sandside Lodge. Governors recognise that they have a key role to play if the school is to achieve its goal to be outstanding. They are keen to be more strategic in their support and to increase their level of challenge to the leadership team. Together, you have already started to lay the foundations for this. In the past, governors have been overwhelmed by the quantity of information

provided. You are starting to streamline this so that they are able to assimilate key information more quickly and so use their time to better effect.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are thorough. Robust checks are carried out to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children. Comprehensive training ensures that all staff follow up assiduously on any concerns. The school works well with its external partners. Record-keeping is meticulous. Staff make sure that the curriculum is filled with a wealth of opportunities to teach pupils how to keep themselves safe. Parents and staff agree that pupils are safe and well cared for.

### **Inspection findings**

- You and your team work closely with pupils and their families to promote good attendance. While you recognise the considerable challenges faced by some of your pupils, you make sure that families are in no doubt about the importance of regular school attendance. Although you have managed to arrest the decline in attendance, you recognise that this aspect of the school's work must remain a high priority.
- Your staff are enthusiastic in finding out about new approaches for working with pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Their professional curiosity is paying dividends in helping your pupils to be successful learners. Everyone has embraced new technologies. These technologies are benefiting pupils with the most profound needs, such as the eye gaze communication system in particular. You are keen to reach out and work with schools locally and regionally, sharing ideas and helping each other. Sandside Lodge is held in high regard by colleagues in local schools and the local authority.
- Good behaviour is a strength of the school. The school is a calm and orderly learning environment. Older pupils are excellent role models to their younger counterparts. Pupils are keen to please their teachers and other adults. Pupils get on well together, both in the classroom and at breaktimes. Pupils are encouraged to contribute to their behaviour support plans. Staff make sure that they are consistent in their approach so that pupils learn to regulate their own behaviour effectively.
- You and your team offer a wealth of enrichment activities to complement the school's core curriculum. The majority of your pupils take part in myriad clubs, including yoga, gardening and cycling. Older pupils are encouraged to take part in activities as diverse as a local music festival, a trip to Auschwitz and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. These experiences enable your pupils to flourish as they take greater responsibility for themselves, face personal challenges and grow in self-confidence.
- Sandside Lodge now offers a number of places for pupils who have autistic spectrum conditions. Your team are developing their experience and expertise in working successfully with these pupils. Moreover, some of the approaches you have implemented for these pupils have benefited other pupils in your school. You

are all excited by your plans to establish an autism resource provision as part of the move to the new building. You hope that this provision will benefit local pupils and their schools.

- Parents appreciate the wealth of information they receive from school. Your teachers make good use of the home-school journal as well as a weekly update to keep parents informed about what their children have been doing in school. You and your colleagues' friendly and approachable manner reassures parents. This is particularly important when pupils start at your school. You take the time to show parents around the school and get to know them and their child. Consequently, parents feel they are valued partners in their children's education.

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

Governors should increase their understanding of the strengths and areas needing improvement in the school and make more focused use of their time, so that they provide more effective challenge and support to the leadership team.

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

Pippa Jackson Maitland  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

- Inspectors met with senior leaders, teaching and support staff. An inspector met with the chair and a member of the governing body.
- Inspectors also spoke to a representative of the local authority as well as headteachers from local schools.
- Inspectors considered the 14 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. An inspector talked to parents at the start of the school day.
- An inspector met formally with a group of staff and considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey of staff.
- Inspectors talked formally and informally to pupils throughout the school day.
- Inspectors visited classrooms to observe pupils' learning.
- Inspectors looked at information about pupils' progress and attainment, the school's self-evaluation and action plan as well as a range of other documentation.
- Inspectors conducted a review of safeguarding, including an evaluation of the school's policies and procedures to keep pupils safe, training records, recruitment checks and record-keeping.