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Helen Connor  
Headteacher  
Rhyl Primary School  
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Dear Ms Connor

### **Short inspection of Rhyl Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 24 January 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 March 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 joined the school in September 2014, and between then and now you have improved the rigour with which leaders review the quality of teaching and learning. You have created a strong leadership team that shares your high expectations for all staff and pupils. Parents, staff, governors and pupils all agree that the school is a better place as a result of your strong leadership and the improvements that you have implemented since you took up post.

You have successfully addressed the areas for improvement that were identified at the last inspection and have improved the quality of teaching over time. Leaders hold well-organised and focused meetings to discuss pupils' progress. Together with teachers, leaders set targets for pupils' achievements and implement the right actions to improve the outcomes for individuals and groups. You acknowledge that there needs to be a greater emphasis on increasing the proportion of pupils who are working at greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics.

The governors have a secure understanding of the progress that pupils are making. They interrogate the assessment information you give them and have a clear knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for improvement.

One significant improvement since your appointment is the way in which the school works with parents and families. Parents comment favourably about the opportunities you provide for them to come into school, work alongside their children and learn for themselves about how they can support their children at

home, particularly in reading, writing and phonics. Pupils could not wait to tell me about why they love their school. They say that the changes you have made are improving their learning. Pupils respond well to your high expectations, especially in relation to their handwriting and presentation. Pupils take pride in their learning and the work in their books is neat and well presented. Pupils talk knowledgeably about how the wide range of enrichment opportunities, such as the outdoor classroom, help them to become lifelong learners. As one parent said: 'Children at Rhyl are taught to believe in themselves and others in an environment that is diverse, stimulating and nurturing.'

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders ensure that all the necessary safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that safeguarding records are detailed and of high quality. All staff, including governors, understand their roles and responsibilities regarding pupils' welfare and safety. Leaders ensure that the checks made on the suitability of staff are robust. All pre-employment checks meet statutory requirements.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and value the many ways that staff help them to sort out problems and listen to their worries. There is a strong culture of working together to keep children safe. Training for staff is up to date and relates not only to the government statutory guidance but also the context of this school. Referrals to the local authority to report safeguarding concerns are rigorously monitored and the school's work with other agencies, including counsellors, is strong. Pupils know how to stay safe online and what to do if they are worried about something somebody says or does.

### **Inspection findings**

- My first line of enquiry focused on how well girls achieve. Last year, girls' achievement was lower than boys' achievement in key stage 1 and key stage 2.
- The work in pupils' books shows that girls take pride in their learning and that they make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Girls enjoy reading, use the skills that they have been taught to tackle new words well and work hard at answering difficult questions about a range of texts. Teachers work closely with leaders to ensure that the activities planned meet the needs of both girls and boys. You, together with the deputy headteacher, monitor the progress of girls closely and have been successful at quickly addressing any concerns that arise.
- The 'raising aspirations programme' has been instrumental in improving the achievement of pupils, particularly girls. It has enabled girls to aspire highly in their school work and in thinking about their future careers. The school's assessment information confirms that girls make equally good progress to boys.
- Your analysis has identified that pupils are making good progress. However, scrutiny of the school's assessment information and evidence in pupils' books indicates that not enough pupils are reaching the greater depth standards in reading, writing and mathematics. You have already started to implement initiatives to address this. For example, teachers have started to provide more

regular opportunities for pupils to solve problems and use reasoning in mathematics. You have introduced more challenging texts to develop pupils' comprehension skills and are working hard to further improve the teaching of reading and writing throughout the school, particularly for the most able pupils. However, these initiatives are not yet embedded firmly in all year groups to enable a higher proportion of pupils to achieve a greater depth of understanding in reading, writing and mathematics.

- My second line of enquiry looked at how well pupils, particularly the disadvantaged pupils, are achieving in phonics. Although improving year on year, the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard in phonics in Year 1 and Year 2 was below the national average. The outcomes of disadvantaged pupils were lower than those of other pupils nationally.
- The leadership of phonics teaching is strong. Leaders work closely with teachers to plan activities that are well matched to each group and build successfully on what pupils know and can do. Learning environments promote phonics well. In the Nursery, children enjoyed singing and learning about the 's' sound and were excited about matching initial sounds to words in the story. In Reception and Year 1, pupils are taught in small groups where they learn to read new words. Pupils had fun using real objects, such as a wok, rice and vegetables, to help them use phonics well.
- Support to help pupils who are new to learning English develop their vocabulary is particularly well planned in these focus groups. The school's assessment information confirms that the proportion of pupils on track to reach the expected standard in Year 1 is high and shows a further improvement on last year. The difference between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally is diminishing over time.
- The next line of enquiry related to the provision for children in the early years. Over the last three years, the proportion of children who reached a good level of development was below the national average.
- Leaders make sure that children's starting points are assessed accurately. These assessments illustrate that the majority of children join the school having very low starting points. Leaders, together with staff in the early years, invest much time, funding and resources in this part of the school. Children make strong progress because leaders make sure that teaching, learning and assessment are of high quality. Adults know the children well and they regularly plan activities to meet children's needs and interests.
- The early years classrooms are a hive of excitement and engagement. Every space is used well to promote learning, particularly reading and writing. For example, children chose to write about their favourite aliens in Reception, and quickly reminded adults that they must 'think it, say it, write it' before attempting their sentences. Elsewhere in Reception, adults promote children's speaking and listening skills well. For example, as children created parachutes from plastic bags and wrote descriptive sentences, adults modelled spoken language effectively. Current assessment information shows that the proportion of children who are on track to achieve a good level of development is higher than last year. Consequently, the early years provision is a strength of the school.
- My final line of enquiry focused on attendance. The attendance of all pupils was below the national average last year and has been for the last two years. The

proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school was above the national average.

- You have put in place more robust systems to address pupils' absence. For example, leaders and learning mentors work closely with families to improve attendance. You have strengthened the way in which absences are monitored. You do not authorise any holidays in term time and you are using other avenues to reinforce this message, including penalty notices. The impact of this is that attendance for some pupils is improving, including for those who are persistently absent. However, current information shows that while overall attendance has improved slightly, it remains below the national average, particularly for those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' attendance improves, particularly for those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- teaching in all year groups routinely provides challenging learning opportunities that allow pupils to acquire the skills needed to achieve a greater depth of understanding in reading, writing and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Gary Rawlings  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

The inspector agreed to prioritise the following areas with the school at the start of the inspection:

- the achievement of girls throughout the school
- what leaders are doing to raise standards in phonics, particularly for the disadvantaged pupils
- the effectiveness of early years provision in enabling more children to reach a good level of development
- pupils' attendance
- the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.

The inspector carried out the following activities to explore these areas during the inspection:

- discussions with the headteacher, senior leaders, governors and learning mentors

- a formal meeting with pupils and informal discussions with pupils in classes
- visits to most classes in all year groups, including the early years provision
- scrutiny of the school's documentation relating to governance, safeguarding, pupils' progress and leaders' monitoring of the quality of teaching
- listening to girls read in key stage 1 and key stage 2
- a check on the single central record
- a telephone call to the local authority's representative
- scrutiny of the 31 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's questionnaire for parents.