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6 March 2017

Mrs Janine Cox  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Cox

### **Short inspection of Ridgmont Lower School**

Following my visit to the school on 21 February 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 February 2012.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Pupils and parents are very positive about the quality of education provided at Ridgmont Lower School. Parents commented upon the friendly, caring ethos, of which you are justifiably proud. Several explained that they have moved their children to Ridgmont Lower because of this feature of the school. Pupils' enthusiasm at the start of the school day is palpable. One parent commented that, 'our children are thriving, happy to come to school each day and make good progress.' Many other parents echoed this sentiment.

Since your arrival in September 2014, the number of pupils on roll at the school has risen significantly. You provide calm, determined leadership and have brought stability and added momentum to school improvement. You have also ensured that, in addition to providing the nurturing community that parents and pupils value, there is clear focus on the progress that pupils make. You have raised expectations of what pupils can and should achieve. As well as rightly challenging practice that needed to improve, you recognise the importance of supporting staff to develop their skills. Staff appreciate the training and career development opportunities provided. Teachers are applying the knowledge and strategies developed through this training well.

You carefully track the progress that each pupil makes, including the small numbers of pupils who are disadvantaged, and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Teachers use this information to plan learning that is typically well matched to each pupil's needs. Parents value this careful attention each child receives. Parental comments included, 'The school treats my child as an individual,' and, 'The school recognises her individual needs and she has come on in leaps and bounds.' As a result of your work and that of your staff, pupils' outcomes are good and improving in the early years, and at key stage 1 and lower key stage 2.

Leaders have also ensured that the areas identified for improvement at the time of the previous inspection have been addressed. For example, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in mathematics at the end of key stage 1 was higher than the national average. Pupils are also being provided with opportunities to make use of their numeracy skills in subjects such as science. You accurately identify, and are acting upon, areas that need further development. For example, action to improve the quality of phonics teaching is already having a positive impact.

Governance is improving. You are being supported well by the restructured governing body and governors have responded well to the findings of their recently commissioned audit. Under the knowledgeable leadership of the acting chair, the governing body has a growing understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Governors share your ambition for the school and its pupils, and understand their role well. They make use of information gathered from school visits and external reports to present appropriate challenges to you and your staff.

Ridgmont Lower is a friendly and happy school. Pupils typically behave well and are keen to learn. Lessons seen during the inspection were characterised by positive relationships and good behaviour. Pupils told me that this is 'how lessons are' at their school. The well-designed curriculum encourages pupils to reflect upon, and develop a good understanding of, why the skills they are learning are important. As a consequence, they are being prepared well for the next stages of their education. One pupil, to the agreement of others, commented that, 'they teach us the right things here'.

Pupils socialise well at breaktimes, making energetic use of the impressive range of activities available to them. They understand the importance of showing respect and kindness to others in their small school. Pupils appreciate the work of the adults in school. Consequently, pupils are happy, confident and increasingly resilient in their learning and play.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Pupils and parents agree that Ridgmont Lower School is a safe place in which to learn. You, your staff and governors have ensured that safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements.

Pupils know what bullying is and understand the upset that it can cause. They explained that bullying is something that rarely happens and adults would deal with it well should it occur. Pupils say that they feel safe and are clear that they would be confident to speak with an adult in school if they had any worries. Pupils have an age-appropriate understanding of potential risks when using the internet. They also explained that the school gives them information which helps them to stay safe when near roads.

Staff are trained in relevant aspects of safeguarding, including the government's 'Prevent' duty. They know what action to take if they have concerns about the well-being of a child. All of the adults who completed the staff survey expressed confidence that pupils are safe in school.

Leaders, including governors, ensure that appropriate checks are carried out on adults working at the school. Records, including those of the actions leaders take when a child is vulnerable or in need of additional support, are securely held and well maintained.

## **Inspection findings**

- To ascertain that the school remains good, I sought to establish the quality of education in the early years. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development has risen over the past two years and was higher than the national average in 2016. Inspection evidence confirms that these improvements have been sustained. Children are increasingly confident learners and make good progress from their individual and varied starting points. This is because learning is well matched to each child's needs and adults provide appropriate support to those children who need it.
- As a second line of enquiry, I explored how well pupils are achieving in phonics. You know that standards were not high enough in 2016. You have carefully analysed why this was the case and are taking appropriate action to ensure that outcomes improve. You have amended how phonics is taught. Learning is more closely matched to each pupil's needs. Pupils take part enthusiastically in phonics sessions and are confident in recognising and blending sounds. They also make good use of these skills in their reading. Teachers provide more opportunities for pupils to apply their phonics skills through extended writing, especially in English. Consequently, higher proportions of pupils are on track to achieve the expected standard in the phonics screening check. Despite this being the case, you are correctly continuing to monitor the quality of phonics teaching.
- I considered what leaders are doing to increase the number of pupils who achieve greater depth in mathematics and writing at the end of key stage 1. As a result of your effective training, staff increasingly provide opportunities for pupils to grapple with more challenging mathematical problems. Evidence from pupils' books demonstrates that pupils, especially the most able, are responding to this well, and making stronger progress as a result. Pupils told me how much they enjoy the increased challenge in their lessons.

- Your accurate monitoring information indicates that more pupils are working at greater depth in writing. Pupils relish the challenge of the more ambitious writing tasks they are now provided with in English lessons. However, teachers do not consistently provide opportunities for pupils to apply the same high standard of literacy skills that they demonstrate in their English work to other subjects, such as history and geography.
- To confirm whether the school continues to provide a good quality of education, I explored how well pupils achieve across key stage 2. You track pupils' progress carefully across a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. This information, as well as evidence seen in pupils' books, demonstrate that many pupils make good progress from their individual starting points across a range of subjects in Years 3 and 4.
- While overall attendance was higher than the national average in 2016, this was not the case for a small number of pupils. This is why pupils' attendance was a line of enquiry on this inspection. You demonstrate great determination in ensuring that pupils attend as frequently as they should. You can show that this helps some pupils with a history of low attendance to dramatically improve their attendance. You are aware that you need to continue this work to ensure that the small number of pupils who do not attend as well as they should, do so.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers provide more opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy skills to the same standard that they do in English, in subjects such as history and geography
- information from leaders' monitoring of the quality of teaching in phonics is used effectively to continue to raise achievement
- the work being done to improve pupils' attendance continues.

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

Yours sincerely

John Lucas  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the course of this inspection, I held meetings with you, your office manager, other senior and middle leaders and two governors. I spoke with pupils informally in classrooms and when walking around the school site. I also met with a group of nine pupils chosen by you. During two tours of the school with you, I visited each class and observed pupils at work. I undertook a scrutiny of pupils' work in their books and folders.

Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined, along with the school's record of checks carried out on staff working at the school. A range of documents was analysed or discussed, including: the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans; documents relating to pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour; minutes of governing body meetings; and the school's records of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

I took account of the views of eight members of staff and 11 pupils who responded to the Ofsted online surveys. Although there were too few responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, to analyse, I considered the views of a small number of parents expressed via the Parent View free-text facility. I also took into account the opinions of parents who spoke with me over the course of the inspection, as well as the results of the school's own parent survey.