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Mrs Sarah O'Neill
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Dear Mrs O'Neill

Short inspection of Rolvenden Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 7 March 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The school has had significant leadership changes since the last inspection, including a new chair of the governing body, an interim headteacher and an acting deputy headteacher. This period of turbulence led to low staff morale and a dip in parental confidence in the school. Since your appointment in 2016, you have given leaders, governors and staff a clear sense of purpose and direction. Parents are now universally positive about the calmness and stability you have brought to the school. As a result, numbers on roll are rising. You have the confidence of the governors, local authority and staff.

At the last inspection, leaders were asked to improve the quality and effectiveness of middle leadership. You have wasted no time in addressing this fully. An example is that new leadership in the early years has improved home-school communication and ensured a brighter, more stimulating learning environment. Parents appreciate better communication between school and home, such as the 'golden moments' book parents write in and share with the teacher. From starting points, which are mostly typical for their age, children make good progress. Your current assessments of children's progress show the vast majority are on track to reach a good level of development.

You are driving school improvement forward at a fast pace. Staff are fully on board and equally dedicated. Parents see this for themselves. As one parent said, 'The teachers are clearly passionate about what they do.' You are determined to raise

expectations of what pupils can achieve and have established a system of tracking pupils' progress closely. As a result, any underachievement is challenged and early support to help pupils catch up is put in place. You agree, however, that for assessment and tracking systems to be even more effective, staff need to adapt lesson materials to ensure that the most able pupils are suitably challenged.

Governors have a sound knowledge and understanding of how groups of pupils are achieving. As a result, they not only offer strong strategic support but also hold leaders to account rigorously for the school's performance. They value your strong leadership and how you are developing senior and middle leaders. The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets pupils' needs well. Parents and children enthuse about its creativity, such as the 'winter wonderland', a special event to bring the community together, which one parent described as 'amazing'. Such is the dedication of you and your staff that this was successfully held on a Saturday! Year 5 and Year 6 pupils benefit from visiting the local secondary school weekly to be taught science in the school's laboratories. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about seasonal 'welly walks' to look at changes in the natural environment and the fun camping trip for older pupils. You are rightly aware, however, that there are some aspects of pupils' cultural understanding which are less well developed.

Behaviour in lessons, on the playground and around school is good. Pupils are courteous and respectful to others. You introduced a new behaviour policy so that rewards and sanctions for behaviour are clear to everyone. Pupils told me they try hard to avoid getting into the 'red zone' of their class behaviour chart and as a result, the school's records show good behaviour over time. In lessons, children listen well, work cooperatively and are keen to contribute because of excellent relationships between learners and adults.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are understood by all and fit for purpose. Where necessary, comprehensive processes are in place to support pupils and their families. Staff know pupils well, and prompt action is taken when needed to keep children safe. You have improved processes for making referrals when concerns arise. Links with external agencies are strong, and records are appropriately detailed and of high quality. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and are confident that, 'If someone is sad, teachers do their best to help.'

The most recent published information suggests that particular groups of pupils are persistently absent much more than is the case nationally. There is compelling evidence that the school has identified the reasons for this on an individual basis. As a result of the school's resolute efforts, persistent absence is reducing for all groups of pupils and overall attendance is in line with the national average. Parents value the work of the school's family liaison officer, whose work effectively reduces absence rates.

Inspection findings

- A focus of this inspection was to find out if improvements in achievement in 2016 were being sustained. Inspection activities also focused on whether disadvantaged and most-able pupils were making the progress of which they are capable. I also looked at how successful the school had been in improving attendance for current pupils.
- Since the last inspection, you have introduced a new leadership structure. Leaders have benefited from training which has enabled them to hold teachers to account for the progress of children in their class. As a result, expectations are rising for all pupils, although you acknowledge that there is more to be done to ensure that the most able pupils are challenged consistently well.
- Your systematic and analytical approach to identifying school development priorities has ensured that there is a greater emphasis on reasoning skills in mathematics and this is reflected in the work in pupils' books. As a result, the assessments you shared show that the vast majority of pupils in the school are making expected progress in mathematics, with an increasing proportion making accelerated progress.
- The teaching of writing has improved. Pupils are encouraged to be ambitious in their choice of vocabulary and to write about first-hand experiences. They develop skills well through your chosen 'stepped' approach, which includes drafting and self-editing. Pupils say that they feel confident about writing. There are many examples of high-quality writing in books, especially in upper key stage 2.
- The quality of teaching has improved because underperformance has been tackled successfully. The teaching of phonics and reading is good. As a result, the proportion of pupils who meet the expected standard at the end of Year 1 has risen over the last two years. More pupils now achieve the standard expected for their age.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers use assessment information and their professional judgement effectively, to ensure that teaching meets the needs of all pupils, especially the most able
- the curriculum broadens pupils' cultural experiences, so that they have an understanding and appreciation of different cultures within school and further afield.

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

published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lynda Welham
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, you and I observed pupils' learning in all classes. I considered a range of evidence including the school's latest information about pupils' progress, the school improvement plan, leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness, and work in pupils' books. I held several meetings with you and your middle and senior leaders. I also met with representatives of the governing body and spoke on the telephone with a representative of the local authority. I spoke to pupils about their learning and took account of 16 staff and 77 pupil views through questionnaires. I viewed the 71 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. At the beginning of the day I spoke to parents and carers.