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Miss Kate Bishop  
Headteacher  
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Dear Miss Bishop

### **Short inspection of Rotherfield Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 3 May 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 May 2012.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Since being appointed as headteacher in September 2015, you have provided strong leadership and stability through a period of significant change in the school. You and other leaders have restored the confidence of parents and carers in the school. Many told me that your leadership is decisive and inspirational. You work closely with your deputy headteacher and middle leaders to drive forward improvements. Staff say they feel valued and proud to work at the school. Typical responses in the staff questionnaire include, 'This school is a wonderful environment to work in; there is a real sense of a team.' You care about the well-being of all members of the school community and this permeates all your work. As a result, pupils told me, 'Every class is one big group of friends.' Many also said that there was never a day when they did not want to come to school.

You have lost no time in responding to the slip in standards in key stage 1 phonics last year. An example of this is individual letters sent to key stage 1 parents identifying which sounds their children do not know. You have provided staff with additional support and training in the teaching of phonics and spelling. As a result of staff's increased expertise, pupils are making more rapid progress.

You have successfully tackled the areas that were identified in the last inspection as

needing further improvement. For example, you have introduced new methods of teaching mathematics so that pupils of all abilities are stretched and challenged well in lessons. Pupils are developing their reasoning skills so that they can tackle more difficult work and many more are on track to achieve higher levels than last year.

You were also asked to ensure that all pupils have regular opportunities to use their skills in mathematics and English across the curriculum. I saw many excellent examples of writing and mathematics in other subjects, such as science, history and religious education.

However, you and your leaders are not complacent. You recognise that progress in writing needs to accelerate in order to achieve outcomes which are as good as they are in reading and mathematics. You are now wisely focusing on improving pupils writing further by providing more opportunities for them to write at length and extend their vocabulary.

The new governing body is energetic and enthusiastic. Members are developing their skills and knowledge well and beginning to visit the school to see for themselves what leaders are telling them. Governors would be even more effective in their monitoring roles if they focused more sharply on outcomes of groups of pupils.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You and your governors place a high priority on keeping pupils safe. The nurture and care for the individual are strengths of the school's work.

Improvements have been made in the security of the site and pupils say that they feel safe and secure when in school. All checks and procedures for recruiting staff safely are carried out and recorded diligently. The leadership team has established a culture of everyone being responsible for safety in the school, not just one or two named individuals. Staff and governors are trained effectively to identify signs of risk or harm and their knowledge and skills are frequently updated.

The curriculum contributes well to pupils' understanding of how to manage their own safety, for example safety when using the internet. Pupils were very clear that discrimination has no place in Rotherfield. They told me, 'We are all equal, we are all the same, no matter what we look like.' There are no reports of bullying of any kind from pupils, parents or staff. Parents speak highly of the open and accessible lines of communication with staff. Strong links with outside agencies help to keep vulnerable children safe. Parents of families experiencing difficulties much appreciate the daily written and verbal communication they receive.

### **Inspection findings**

- The focus of this inspection was to investigate the reasons for weaker outcomes in phonics in key stage 1 last year and what actions the school has taken to ensure better outcomes this year. Inspection activities also focused on how good progress in writing is compared to progress in mathematics in key stage 2. I also looked at pupils'

rates of absence and whether the few disadvantaged pupils are making good progress.

- Pupils at Rotherfield achieve well by the end of their time at the school. Leaders and teachers ensure that pupils are challenged effectively and suitably prepared for key stage 2 statutory tests. A greater-than-average proportion reach the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils do equally well in key stage 1, apart from in phonics in 2016. However, some middle-attaining pupils made less progress in writing than others at the end of key stage 2 in 2016. You have made the teaching of phonics and spelling a priority. You and the staff are dedicated to improving writing by giving pupils opportunities to write at length and use a wider range of vocabulary. One example is the way pupils are encouraged to write unaided across the curriculum. Teachers have a clearer focus on what is needed to be raise standards in writing; pupils make stronger progress as a result of this approach. The proportion of pupils achieving greater depth in writing is improving well.
- There are very small numbers of disadvantaged pupils in each year group. Including the most able disadvantaged pupils, this group generally achieves at least in line with, and in some areas more highly than, other pupils nationally. You recognise, however, that not all of the very few disadvantaged pupils in key stage 2 in 2016 achieved as well as those in previous years. You rightly recognise that tracking of outcomes for all groups needs to be sharper so that teachers can be held to account for the progress their pupils make.
- The effectiveness of governors in holding leaders to account is improving significantly. They have benefited from training and guidance they have received on how to understand data. We agreed, however, that linking the school visits they choose to make with the school's priorities, particularly the progress of different groups, however small, would make their work even more effective.
- The new early years leader carefully checks how well children are doing. She ensures that the proportion of children reaching a good level of development is well above average, as it has been since the last inspection.
- You and your deputy headteacher have supported new subject leaders in English and mathematics very well. Their action plans are well-considered and reviewed regularly. They are passionate about their subjects and rigorously monitor teaching and pupils' learning. They have worked tirelessly to involve parents in how their subjects are being taught and how parents can support their child's learning. Parents are given suggestions for strategies to use at home to help their children make stronger progress in phonics. Pupils' achievement in phonics is rising.
- Pupils understand British values and recognise their importance. A varied curriculum which includes studies of other societies and major religions ensures that pupils are aware of the diverse nature of society. Pupils have a very clear sense of right and wrong and are champions for equality within their school. They are very proud to be pupils at Rotherfield, behave impeccably in lessons and approach learning with confidence and determination to succeed.
- You have been relentless in tackling pupil absence. Overall attendance levels are now above average for all but a very few pupils. Their absence is being tackled on an individual basis and there is compelling evidence of the school doing all it can,

including involving outside agencies, to raise pupils' attendance levels.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- targets in improvement plans focus tightly on assessing all groups of pupils' progress in each year
- teaching of writing is strengthened further so that progress in pupils' writing is similar to, or better than, that in reading and mathematics
- governors hold leaders more fully to account for the implementation and success of school plans.

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

Yours sincerely

Lynda Welham  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, I held several meetings with you and your senior and middle leaders. I also met with representatives of the governing body and held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. I observed the quality of learning with you in all year groups except for Year 1, which was on a school trip. I observed behaviour at playtime. As well as talking to pupils in lessons, I met with a group of pupils from across the school to discuss their learning. With middle leaders, I analysed progress in pupils' books.

I considered a range of evidence, including the school's latest assessment information, the school improvement plan, leaders' self-evaluation, pupils' work, and child protection procedures and policies. I considered parents' comments through informal discussions at the beginning of the school day, along with the 67 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also took account of 11 questionnaires from staff.