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Mrs Rachel West
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs West

Short inspection of Laughton Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 17 July 2018, 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Together with the acting deputy headteacher and governors, you lead the school with an unwavering commitment to enable pupils to achieve high academic standards and to become confident, resilient individuals. Senior leaders have a very clear understanding of the strengths of the school and have focused on the right areas for improvement. They have tackled these areas with rigour and determination and have seen many improvements as a result.

Pupils love coming to school. Year 6 pupils have very happy memories of their time there. They say that teachers are kind and reassuring, especially during the recent national assessment tests. Younger pupils echoed this view. In particular, pupils say that teachers are warm, welcoming and supportive. Strong relationships between pupils and teachers underpin pupils' good attitudes to learning. Pupils relish the challenges that teachers provide, and behave well both in lessons and around the school.

Teachers use accurate assessments of pupils' learning to plan lessons that interest and challenge pupils. For example, in mathematics pupils can select their own level of work, knowing that there is always another challenge if the activity they have chosen is too easy. Teachers typically have high expectations of what pupils can achieve, but at times these expectations dip, and consequently pupils achieve less

well than they are capable of in their written work.

Parents are fulsome in their praise for the school. They appreciate the way that staff know the pupils well and help them to achieve well. This helps the school to have a nurturing, welcoming, friendly atmosphere. Some parents described the school as feeling like a 'big family'. One said: 'There is a strong sense of community within the school, and the staff are very friendly and approachable, offering support and guidance to children and parents alike.' Parents of pupils who have moved to the school from other schools this academic year are particularly delighted, noting marked improvements in their children's attitudes to school and rapid improvements in their academic progress.

Staff morale is high. All who expressed a view strongly agreed that they enjoy working at the school and feel proud to be part of the staff team. You place a high priority on the professional development of staff. Whenever there have been new initiatives or different approaches to some aspect of teaching, staff have had the right training to implement them successfully. Senior leaders have invested in developing leadership skills in middle leaders. As a result, there is a wide range of skills and expertise in the staff team. However, leaders are also outward-looking, always on the lookout for opportunities to learn from other successful schools as well as offering advice and support to other local schools where needed.

Children get off to a good start in the early years. They make good progress from their different starting points and in recent years the proportion who achieved a good level of development has been above the national average.

Pupils attain well at the end of each key stage. At the end of key stage 2 in 2017, the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics was above that seen nationally. Outcomes at the end of Year 2 were in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils who achieved the higher standards in reading and writing in 2017 was at least in line with the national average. Fewer pupils achieved this standard in mathematics. However, provisional results from the 2018 key-stage-2 assessments show that a much greater proportion of pupils made faster progress and achieved these higher standards in writing and mathematics. This was an area that inspectors asked leaders to improve at the previous inspection.

The few disadvantaged pupils achieve well and make good progress from their starting points. However, pupils do not achieve as well in the wider curriculum as they do in the core subjects of English and mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils feel completely safe in school. Parents and staff agree that this is true. Senior leaders place the welfare of pupils at the heart of the school's work. Staff have had the right training and ongoing advice so that all are clear about how to recognise and record any concerns about a pupil. Policies, protocols and procedures underpin the effective safeguarding practice and cover the full range of safety

matters in school. Governors ensure that the right checks have been carried out on people who apply to work in the school.

Bullying is very rare in school. Pupils struggle to remember any recent incidents, but have great confidence in the staff to deal with any incidents that might occur. The curriculum provides various opportunities for pupils to learn about being safe, including around fire, on the road and online. Consequently, pupils have a good age-appropriate understanding of e-safety.

Inspection findings

- We identified four aspects of the school's work to focus on during this inspection. The first was to explore the effectiveness of leaders' actions to enable more pupils, especially girls, to achieve the higher standard in mathematics by the end of key stage 2. Senior leaders have ensured that staff have a clear understanding of how to enable pupils to develop a mastery of mathematics. The leader of mathematics provides a strong example for others to follow, having had the right support and training to equip her for this role.
- Teachers have high expectations in mathematics. They ensure that pupils understand the mathematics they are learning, and that pupils are able to explain their learning, using the correct mathematical vocabulary. For example, in the Year 3/4 class pupils were experimenting with different shapes, confidently using such terms as 'parallel', 'scalene' and 'perpendicular'.
- Provisional results from this year's tests show that the proportion of pupils who achieved the higher standard in mathematics increased sharply in 2018 to well above that seen nationally in 2017. More girls than previously have also achieved this standard.
- Next, we looked at how teachers are helping pupils to achieve the higher standard in writing. Senior leaders have invested in new approaches to teaching spelling, grammar and punctuation, including by using exciting texts as starting points for pupils. Teachers encourage pupils to talk in detail about writing, exploring different texts and the way that authors use words and grammar for effect.
- Pupils are making good progress in writing, but this is hampered at times by teachers' inconsistent expectations. At times, pupils are not held to account for the quality of their written work, and their progress slows. Results from this academic year show that the proportion of pupils who achieve the 'greater depth' standard by the end of Year 6 has increased significantly to well above the national average. The high levels of attainment at the end of Year 2 have also been maintained. However, progress across key stage 2 is inconsistent, and in some year groups the number of pupils on track to achieve this higher standard is lower than in Year 6.
- The next line of enquiry was to do with how well pupils achieve across the wider curriculum. Pupils benefit from a broad, balanced and varied curriculum. They regularly take part in science experiments and investigations and learn at first hand. Provision for physical education and games is good. Pupils have many

opportunities to learn a range of games and physical activities, including fencing, gymnastics and dodgeball. Staff have arranged for school teams to participate in competitions with local schools. Several pupils spoke very positively about how yoga helps to calm and relax them when they are feeling stressed. The curriculum in subjects such as history and geography is further supplemented by visits to interesting places, by extra-curricular clubs, and by visitors to the school.

- Work in pupils' topic books shows that all curriculum areas are covered. However, the quality of work in these books is mostly of a lower standard than in English and mathematics books. Pupils have not developed the same subject-specific knowledge, skills and understanding across the broader curriculum to achieve the same high standards as in English and mathematics.
- Finally, we looked at how well phonics is taught. In recent years the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard at the end of Year 1 has been declining, although all pupils reached this standard by the end of Year 2.
- Senior leaders have provided training and support so that staff in key stage 1 have the right skills, knowledge and understanding to be able to teach phonics to a high standard. As a result, the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check improved markedly this year so that it is well above that seen nationally in recent years.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers have consistently high expectations for pupils' written work
- pupils have greater opportunity to develop subject-specific skills and knowledge across the wider curriculum so that they achieve as well in other subjects as they do in English 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 East Sussex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Bruce Waelend
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I had meetings with you and the acting deputy headteacher, other leaders and three members of the governing body. I spoke with a representative of the local authority on the telephone. Senior leaders and I visited all classes in the school to observe teaching and learning. Together, we looked at pupils' work. I observed

pupils' behaviour around the school, including at playtime, and had a meeting with a group of 10 pupils. I considered 10 responses to the staff survey, 32 responses to the pupil survey and 31 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. At the start of the day, I spoke to several parents. I evaluated a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation documents and development plans. I looked closely at the school's safeguarding policies, procedures and checks, and spoke with several members of staff to test out their understanding of these arrangements.