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Mrs Linda Appleby  
Executive Headteacher  
Little Common School  
Shepherds Close  
Bexhill-on-Sea  
East Sussex  
TN39 4SQ

Dear Mrs Appleby

### **Short inspection of Little Common School**

Following my visit to the school on 5 February 2019 with Katherine Powell, Ofsted Inspector, 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 2015.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection will be a section 5 inspection.

You, together with your senior leaders and governors, provide clear direction and a strong sense of purpose, which motivate staff and pupils to achieve exceptionally well. Parents, pupils, staff and governors recognise the very high quality of the leadership you provide. Your track record of expertise is also acknowledged by the local authority through your leadership as executive headteacher of Little Common School and another primary school.

At Little Common School, your inspiring and effective leadership has instilled a culture of high aspirations, expectations and achievement. You have created a highly inclusive, nurturing and welcoming school ethos. Everyone works together to give pupils every opportunity to achieve as well as they possibly can, both in their academic and personal development, whatever their starting points. Staff are proud to work at the school, and have confidence in the school's leadership. One member of staff wrote: 'Leaders have clearly thought about ways to help reduce and manage workload whilst maintaining high standards and expectations. I feel well listened to and appreciated.'

You have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for further development. You have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection. Monitoring, by all teams of leaders and governors, is rigorous and accurate. Most importantly, if any areas for improvement are identified, immediate, appropriate and rapid action is taken to ensure that improvement is established as a matter of urgency. This applies equally to whole-school and individual issues. Your determination to continually refine and improve the work of the school underpins its success. Skilled governors continue to provide you with support, and offer robust challenge. They know the school very well and are determined to promote its role in the community.

You have maintained and improved on the strengths in teaching and learning reported in the previous inspection. Pupils continue to make very strong progress and achieve highly. In 2018, the proportion of pupils that achieved the expected or higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6 increased further from the previous year and continued to be above the national average. However, pupils' progress was stronger in reading and mathematics than it was in writing. You, rightly, have clear targets and actions to improve writing further, focusing on pupils' spelling, spoken language and vocabulary. Current pupils' writing in their books is very strong, already showing the positive impact of this work.

Parents are mostly very positive about the school. Many commented to us on the friendly, nurturing atmosphere that prevails, despite it being a large primary school. Many also commented positively on the consideration given to pupils' emotional and social development. One parent wrote: 'The school has a real community and family feel to it; everyone is welcome and respected.' Another parent expressed the views of many with the comment: 'A great environment to nurture, develop and equip my child for the next chapter of his life. He has enjoyed being stimulated and challenged by the high quality of teaching and extra-curricular opportunities that are provided. All in all, a wonderful, safe learning experience.'

Pupils are a credit to their school. They live up to, and very effectively promote, the school vision of learning, caring and succeeding together. They are exceptionally well behaved and have extremely positive attitudes to learning. They enjoy learning and believe that they learn well because, they said, 'Teachers make learning fun.' Pupils also appreciate the friendly, community atmosphere in the school. A group agreed with one pupil who said that: 'You make your own class your family; we're all caring and make great friends.' Pupils are very polite, friendly, welcoming and keen to share their views of the school. They have a strong voice in the school and are proud to be involved in decision-making, for example in the design of the school library. Pupils are respectful of each other and adults. They were very keen to share messages from the equalities and diversity events that were taking place during the inspection week. They say that, 'everyone should be treated the same', 'it's good to learn about other cultures', and that 'everyone is special'. These attitudes were also reflected in their responses to the pupil survey.

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders have ensured that there is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and records are detailed and thorough. Pupils' well-being and welfare are paramount and lie at the heart of all that the school does. Leaders make careful checks on the suitability of all who work or volunteer in the school. The chair of the governing body has significant expertise in safeguarding and ensures that all the requirements for safeguarding are met.

Staff participate in regular safeguarding training that is compliant with all current regulations and guidance. As a result, staff are vigilant and know what to do to keep pupils safe from a variety of risks, including those relating to online activity. If concerns are raised, the designated safeguarding leaders act swiftly when necessary. They liaise well with other agencies to ensure that pupils who are in need receive timely and effective support. Leaders also place detailed information about child protection, including online safety, on the school's website so that parents also understand the risks.

Staff, parents and pupils agree that the school keeps pupils safe. Pupils say they feel safe and happy in school and are confident to turn to adults for support. One parent wrote: 'My daughter knows who to talk to should she have any concerns and is confident to express her feelings about things she can and can't do.' Another echoed the view of many with the comment: 'This is a school that really cares about each and every child reaching their full potential in a safe, happy and secure environment.'

## **Inspection findings**

- At the start of the inspection we agreed to focus on some key areas of the school's work. As well as inspecting safeguarding, we explored: the teaching of phonics; the achievement of disadvantaged pupils; the provision for and leadership of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); and the impact of the work of middle leaders.
- We found that the teaching of phonics is highly effective, and pupils make exceptional progress, securing excellent understanding and skills. This success is due to the strong leadership, meticulous planning and organisation and highly effective training for all staff. Phonics teaching is consistent across the school. Staff address pupils' misconceptions quickly and effectively. They also set very high expectations and provide challenge, adapting activities as required for pupils.
- Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are supported very well to overcome any barriers to learning. This helps them to make rapid and sustained progress across the curriculum. Leaders and class teachers have regular meetings to check on all pupils' progress. They use these to identify and provide timely additional support for pupils where needed. Leaders have a clear overview of the progress of disadvantaged pupils, including the most able and those who have additional and often complex needs. The additional support for pupils' social and emotional needs has a particularly positive impact on improving their learning

skills and the progress pupils make. This was evident in pupils' books and records of their achievement. Pupil premium funding is spent wisely, helping to remove barriers to learning for pupils, and making a difference to their achievement. The impact of the actions taken to support this group of pupils is monitored with the same rigour as all other actions.

- The provision for pupils with SEND is exceptionally strong and ensures that this group continues to make excellent progress from their varied starting points. Pupils receive targeted, individualised and highly effective intervention inside and outside the classroom. Leadership is skilled, strong and unwavering in determining the best possible support for pupils and their families.
- You have strengthened the role and impact of middle leaders since the previous inspection. Middle leaders are passionate and knowledgeable about their subjects. They feel valued and recognise that the excellent support and training provided have helped them to develop their leadership skills. The impact of their work on the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' outcomes is considerable. They use effective systems to check on pupils' progress across the school. The work of the middle leaders is innovative, and they strongly influence the work of others through a supportive, coaching approach.
- An additional notable factor in the improving progress of all pupils is the broad, balanced and vibrant curriculum, which meets the needs of all groups of pupils particularly effectively. There is an appropriate emphasis on reading, writing and mathematics but not to the exclusion of the wider curriculum and the range of enrichment activities. The inspectors agreed with a parent who wrote: 'Children have so many opportunities beyond the curriculum to excel, with, for example, weekly competitions, cooking, drawing, poetry, maths challenges – their love of learning is nourished in all areas.'

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to improve pupils' progress in writing to at least match that in reading 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

Margaret Coussins  
**Ofsted Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

The inspectors met with you and the deputy headteacher, who is currently the interim head of school. We also met with other leadership teams, phase group leaders and subject leaders. I met with the chair of the governing body and three other governors. I had a telephone conversation with a local authority adviser. You and the deputy headteacher accompanied us on visits to classes. During these visits, we spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at their work. We spoke to pupils around the school, at lunchtime and in the playground, asking them for their views on the school.

We reviewed the school's website and sampled a range of documents and records, including your evaluation of the school's effectiveness, information about pupils' achievement, and documents relating to safeguarding. We took into account 106 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 61 free-text comments and an email from a parent. An inspector spoke to some parents at the start of the school day. We also considered 57 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and 110 responses to the pupil survey.