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Andy Best
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Dear Mr Best

Short inspection of Rocks Park Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 20 March 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 October 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You joined the school in April 2017 at the end of an unsettled period during which there had been no permanent headteacher. You quickly set to the task of implementing changes that had been started by the interim headteacher, while winning the confidence and trust of the whole school community. There have been many changes, but parents, carers and staff agree that these have been implemented with the utmost concern for the children. One of the changes was a new Facebook page to make it easier for parents to stay informed. There is also a detailed website. Although it is informative, it does not contain some important statutory information such as full details about the school's curriculum.

All parents agree that children are happy in school. They are positive about all the staff and the way they take care of pupils. One commented, 'The school is one big team who are always on hand to deal with any problems that should arrive.' This was typical of the many positive comments that parents expressed. The vast majority of parents would recommend the school.

Children get off to a strong start in the early years. Staff provide an exciting range of activities and resources to stimulate children's interest and develop the early skills of literacy and mathematics. One parent said that her son loves school but 'he doesn't seem to have realised he's working hard.' This positive start provides a secure foundation for pupils to achieve well across the school. In 2017, pupils attained above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics at the end

of Year 2. Pupils made good progress across key stage 2 and attained well in reading and writing. Leaders have implemented a new system for tracking the progress and attainment of pupils, but recognise that there is still work to be done to ensure that this system provides consistently accurate information about the progress of groups of pupils.

Pupils show strong attitudes to learning. They behave well, work hard and are keen to succeed. Pupils are happy, friendly and welcoming to visitors. They take pride in their many achievements, and strive to win the rewards on offer. Leaders have placed a strong emphasis on instilling the school values on pupils, staff and parents. These values, such as resilience, independence and aspiration, have a strong impact on pupils, who can explain clearly how they help them meet challenges and overcome difficulties.

You have addressed the area for improvement raised at the previous inspection. Pupils receive regular opportunities to challenge themselves, finding different ways of solving problems and presenting their work. For example, pupils select the most appropriate level of challenge in their work in English and mathematics, so that even the most able pupils know that there is always another challenge available.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff are well trained and clear about how to recognise signs that might indicate that a pupil is at risk. They understand the importance of keeping accurate written records. Leaders keep staff up to date with any issues that affect specific children in the school. Governors play an important role in safeguarding. They undertake a range of important checks, including making sure that only suitable people can work in the school. Governors regularly talk to pupils as part of these checks.

Pupils feel safe in the school. They understand about bullying and can explain clearly the difference between deliberate bullying and occasional arguments and falling out. Pupils, staff and parents agree that there is very little bullying in school, but, when it does happen, staff intervene quickly and effectively. Pupils trust adults to look after them.

Inspection findings

- We agreed to focus on three aspects of the school's work. The first was pupils' attainment and progress in mathematics in key stage 2. At the end of 2017, the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard at the end of key stage 2 was below the national average, especially for pupils of average ability. The progress that these middle-ability pupils made was also well below that of similar pupils nationally. Senior leaders wasted no time in looking for the reasons for this slower progress and noticed that pupils struggled particularly to understand fractions. You provided staff across the school with training to equip them to help teach this aspect of mathematics thoroughly. However, you also made sure that

this training helped staff to provide pupils with a secure understanding of how to teach a wide range of mathematical topics. We saw the positive impact of this training in pupils' exercise books and in their ability to speak confidently about mathematics and tackle challenging problems.

- You also recognised that pupils did not have a rapid recall of important mathematical facts, such as times tables, nor were they able to work out simple calculations quickly in their heads. Pupils talk with great enthusiasm about the 'maths passports' that you introduced. They explain convincingly how these have helped them to become more confident in mathematics because they no longer struggle to recall times-table facts and are much more confident at mental calculation.
- Secondly, we agreed to investigate how well disadvantaged pupils achieve in the school. Leaders have a very clear understanding of the challenges and barriers to learning that these pupils face. The pupil premium is spent effectively to overcome these obstacles and helps most disadvantaged pupils to achieve well. Strong classroom teaching, coupled with carefully targeted additional support, enables disadvantaged pupils to make good progress. This additional support helps address pupils' learning needs, not only in English and mathematics, but also in other areas, such as speech and language and as their social and emotional development.
- Work in exercise books shows little or no difference between disadvantaged pupils and their peers with similar starting points. The strong progress that disadvantaged pupils make is enabling most to achieve in line with their peers and pupils nationally. Only where a very few disadvantaged pupils have additional challenges, such as special educational needs (SEN), do they make slightly slower progress.
- The third area we looked at concerned the governing body and how rigorously governors challenge and support senior leaders. Governors have steered the school successfully through an unsettled time. Recently, they have appointed not only a new headteacher, but also the deputy headteacher. They bring a wide range of experience and skills to their work, including backgrounds in education, finance and safeguarding, equipping them well to provide strong strategic leadership.
- Governors have a good understanding of the strengths and areas of improvement for the school. They draw on evidence from a wide range of sources, including their own visits to the school and reports from the local authority. Visits to the school are carefully focused on areas that have been identified in the school development plans, and are driven by incisive questions that enable governors to concentrate on the most important areas for improvement.
- Senior leaders receive a good balance of support and challenge from governors, including on such matters as how well different groups of pupils are achieving. However, senior leaders and governors are hindered in their work by a newly introduced system for tracking pupils' progress and attainment, which needs sharpening. Information about the progress that groups of pupils make is not accurate enough, because it does not always reflect the progress seen in pupils'

books and in other assessment information.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- systems to track pupils' progress and attainment are strengthened so that :
 - leaders have a more precise understanding of the progress and attainment of different groups of pupils
 - governors are better equipped to hold leaders to account for improving pupils' outcomes
- the school's website meets statutory requirements and is regularly monitored to ensure that it remains so.

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 met with you and the deputy headteacher to discuss various aspects of the school's work. I also met with four members of the governing body and spoke with a representative of the local authority on the telephone. I visited all classes with either you or the deputy headteacher to observe teaching and learning, to talk to pupils, and to look at their work. I observed pupils' behaviour around the school, including at playtime and lunchtime. Several pupils spoke with me on the playground at morning break. I also had a meeting with 10 pupils drawn from Years 2 to 6. I considered 12 responses to the staff survey, 58 responses to the pupil survey and 62 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as speaking to several parents at the beginning of the day. A range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation documents, school improvement plans and safeguarding policies, procedures and checks were also taken into account.