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Mrs Claire Martin-O'Donoghue  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Martin-O'Donoghue

### **Short inspection of Polegate Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 17 April 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 May 2014.

#### **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 be a section 5 inspection.

You provide inspirational leadership, which has led the school from strength to strength, building successfully on the two outstanding elements at the last inspection. You have set out a clear and uncompromising vision for educational excellence that is shared by all staff and governors. Leadership, much of which is 'home grown', is fully distributed across the school. Leaders at all levels are proud to be part of the school team. They feel very well supported and valued in their roles. They keep a careful track of pupils' achievements in their subjects so that support can be put in place quickly where needed. New initiatives, such as changing how reading is taught, are constantly evaluated for impact. You have established an outward-looking school, reflected in your work with other schools in the locality, and with universities. The local authority draws on the high levels of expertise in your school to support teachers in other schools, for example in the teaching of phonics and writing.

You have built a happy and inclusive school. Pupils described the school as 'safe and comforting – there's always someone to look out for us'. Throughout the school, pupils are trying their best, enjoying their learning and supporting one another.

Their behaviour is exemplary, and this makes an exceptional contribution to their learning and the school's safe environment. This was echoed by a parent who described, 'a very relaxed school where children are treated equally'. You have not been complacent about strengths identified in behaviour at the last inspection, however, and continue to develop pupils' individual responsibilities within the school effectively, for example through 'resolution buddies' on the playground.

Since the last inspection, you have led a successful focus on improving outcomes in writing and mathematics, especially for the most able pupils. Pupils' progress in writing and mathematics has been in the top 20% of schools nationwide for almost all groups of pupils over the last three years. Attainment at higher levels and greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics in key stages 1 and 2 have also been above national averages over time.

Despite staff changes, teaching is increasingly strong across all year groups. This is because teachers expect the best from every pupil. They plan lessons with care and set tasks that are not only at the right level, but are sufficiently demanding to ensure that pupils build on their existing skills and abilities. Staff induction processes are thorough and timely and newly qualified teachers are mentored exceptionally well by your deputy headteacher.

You pay continuous attention to pupils' attendance. While attendance overall is in line with national expectations, attendance is lower for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. You have already put in place a raft of helpful measures to address this and have rightly identified it as a priority for future school development.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Training is regularly updated in line with current statutory guidance. Suitability checks on staff, volunteers and all who regularly visit the school are recorded in an exemplary manner.

There are well-established systems within the school for reporting concerns. Records show that the school works closely with a wide range of outside agencies when pupils are thought to be at risk. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe on the internet. You have established a culture of building pupils' self-esteem and ability to communicate with one another and with adults. This has empowered them to speak out if they are concerned about anything. As a result, they have a mature attitude to keeping themselves and others safe. 'We're very protective about bullying,' is how one pupil put it. Pupils simply won't tolerate bullying in any form, and trust that adults will help them to deal with it straight away should it occur.

## Inspection findings

- Effective and dynamic leadership at all levels has led the school from strength to strength. Over time, standards have been above the national average, including the proportions of pupils achieving higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics. This is because leaders have excellent systems for checking how well pupils are doing and swiftly intervene to support any pupil who needs extra help. Clear guidance is given to all teachers and teaching assistants about improving the quality of teaching and raising pupils' achievement.
- Leaders regularly check that what needs to be improved is acted upon swiftly. They set clear criteria for knowing who is going to do what, by when, and how they will know it has been successful. All staff share the school's vision of 'learning without limits'. Pupils have adopted this 'can-do' attitude. For example, one child told me, 'You sometimes have to fail to succeed'.
- Leaders have very high aspirations for disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils. For instance, pupils receive tuition from university staff. They visit universities to see for themselves what higher education offers. As a result, pupils extend their knowledge, skills, self-confidence and ambition. Disadvantaged pupils currently in school are making better-than-expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics, and the gap in attainment between them and their non-disadvantaged peers is closing rapidly.
- Curriculum development, particularly in reading, is another example of how the school has moved forward since the last inspection. Leaders have collaborated with other schools, carried out their own research, and have made the teaching of reading skills even more effective. As a result, the proportion of current pupils reaching higher levels in reading has increased in all year groups. This includes pupils from vulnerable groups. Pupils speak of their love of reading. A pupil told me how he had really disliked reading before he came to Polegate, but that now 'it is fun'.
- The school library has been developed to become a well-stocked, well-used resource. Pupils speak of the 'fantastic' choice of books. A Year 6 pupil summed up leaders' determined efforts to foster a love of reading by saying, 'I feel inspired by books now since coming to this school.'
- Pupils have good understanding of British values because these are taught in a way that is meaningful. For instance, pupils actively participate in democratic processes which mirror real life, such as debating and then voting as to whether or not Britain should leave the European Union. They are active in local politics, trying, for example, to stop the closure of their local library. Representatives from the school went to the House of Commons and visited 'Number 10', having won a Peers in Schools Outreach Programme competition. This helped pupils to engage more with political and parliamentary processes.
- Pupils embody the school's inclusive values. Pupils are well informed about different belief systems and cultures in Britain. They treat each other with remarkable kindness and courtesy. 'Thunk [sic] of the week' discussion cards left on lunch tables are a popular stimulus for discussion on a wide range of topics

linked to equality. 'We are all equal here,' was a representative comment from a pupil.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is raised to the same high level as that of other pupils.

I am copying this letter to the co-chairs 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 deputy headteacher. I also met with representatives of the governing body. I looked at previous reports from the local authority representative and had a telephone conversation with her. With you and your deputy headteacher, I observed the quality of learning in all year groups. I observed pupils' behaviour before school and at playtime. As well as talking to pupils in lessons, I met with a group of pupils from the school council to talk about their experience of school. I heard pupils from Year 4 and Year 6 read. With middle leaders, I analysed progress in pupils' books. I considered a range of evidence, including the school's latest assessment information, the school's priorities for improvement, leaders' self-evaluation and safeguarding procedures and policies. Parents' comments were considered through informal discussions at the beginning of the school day, along with the 94 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.