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Mr Huxley Knox-Macaulay
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Huxley Knox-Macaulay

Short inspection of Ratton School

Following my visit to the school on 6 June 2017 with Sue Wood, 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 April 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 have provided determined and effective leadership aimed at ensuring high-quality and challenging education for every pupil, regardless of their ability or circumstance. Staff support your vision and work very hard to continue to improve the school. The caring and stimulating culture you have created enables pupils to do their best. As a result, pupils make good progress and achieve well at your inclusive school.

School leaders have established a wide-ranging programme of extra lessons, clubs, activities and trips. Pupils value these extra activities that support their academic and personal development. Pupils told us that they enjoy school, and this is reflected in their good levels of attendance. Attendance for most of the pupils who are disadvantaged or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is improving.

Pupils continue to behave well. Typically they are kind and respectful towards each other and their teachers. You have introduced a behaviour management system that is understood well by staff and pupils. Pupils and staff commented that the new behaviour system has brought improvement in pupils' behaviour. It has particularly helped a very small minority of pupils who find it difficult to conform to your high expectations.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to ensure that pupils present their work to a high standard and you have achieved this. Pupils now take great care in presenting their work and they respond consistently and thoughtfully to teachers' feedback. You were also asked to improve pupils' access to the latest computer technology and, as a result of appropriate investment, this has been achieved and pupils are now making expected progress in computing.

Since the last inspection, leaders have developed meticulous systems to assess and track pupils' progress. Consequently, teachers are able to provide prompt and effective additional help to support pupils who are at risk of falling behind. For example, pupils who find reading and writing difficult are given appropriate individual support and quickly begin to make rapid progress. Effective training has helped teachers plan effectively for the needs of pupils of varying abilities. Most pupils now make strong and improving rates of progress in all subjects.

Subject and pastoral leaders monitor effectively the quality of teaching and the impact it has on pupils' progress. As a result, leaders know the strengths of the school, including the strong progress made by pupils in English, the creative arts and science. They also know where further improvement is needed, such as progress of the most able pupils and pupils whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable.

Governors know the school very well and provide strong challenge and support to you and other leaders. Everyone shares your vision that all pupils achieve academically and develop into well-rounded citizens. Parents and pupils speak highly of the school and almost all parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend the school to other parents.

Safeguarding is effective.

Governors and the leadership team have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All records are detailed and of high quality. All staff and governors are trained regularly on how to keep children safe from abuse, sexual exploitation, radicalisation and extremism. Before appointing staff, leaders carry out all the required employment checks. These are then recorded meticulously on the school's single central register.

A dedicated team of staff works with determination and sensitivity alongside pupils, parents and external agencies to support vulnerable pupils. Most parents say that their children feel safe in school. Pupils state that staff are approachable and they know an adult they can turn to if they have any concerns. Pupils appreciate the concern that staff members have for their welfare and well-being.

There is a strong culture of vigilance and support to ensure that pupils are kept safe. Staff and governors are knowledgeable about safeguarding procedures and practices because they receive useful training and updates. The school's off-site activities are carefully monitored and assessed for risk. Governors and leaders keep pupils' safety under close scrutiny.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, inspectors focused on the following lines of enquiry: the effectiveness of the curriculum, particularly for the most able pupils; the attendance and progress of vulnerable pupils; the effectiveness of teaching for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- You have correctly identified that the progress of the most able pupils, although as expected, does not match the strong progress made by your pupils with low or average starting points. You have acted purposefully to ensure that the curriculum and teaching provide more effectively for the most able pupils. Teachers are providing more useful support for the most able pupils, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to experience success in challenging GCSE subjects. For example, the proportion of middle-attaining pupils and the most able pupils successfully taking a modern foreign language is increasing. Teachers expect all of the most able pupils to persevere with challenging work and, as a result, these pupils are beginning to make faster progress than previously. However, there is further to go with these initiatives.
- Leaders support disadvantaged pupils well. You have ensured that disadvantaged pupils make progress in English and mathematics equivalent to other pupils nationally. This has helped disadvantaged pupils to make a successful transition into college or training at the end of Year 11. The progress of each disadvantaged pupil is tracked and teachers intervene promptly if a pupil's achievement slows. Leaders regularly involve the parents of disadvantaged pupils in reviewing progress and making subject choices. As a result, disadvantaged pupils are making more ambitious subject choices and increasingly selecting challenging college courses. Leaders' information about the progress of pupils indicates that most disadvantaged pupils are currently making strong progress in most subjects.
- You have identified that there is a small group of pupils at the school whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable. This group of pupils are well supported in their personal development, and their attendance is improving slowly. Leaders have arranged interesting options for these pupils, who find school difficult, such as the 'Forest School Project' and 'The Community Garden'. Disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils told us that they enjoy these activities, which encourage better attitudes in lessons and improve attendance. However, you correctly recognise that academic progress for these pupils could improve further.
- The arrangements for identifying and helping pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are effective. Leaders and teachers work together to make sure that these pupils achieve well. The curriculum is suitably adapted for individuals who need extra help, particularly with GCSEs.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- plans to provide a more challenging curriculum for the most able pupils are further developed
- staff strengthen the academic support given to the small group of pupils whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable, so that their achievement continues to improve.

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

Yours sincerely

Anne Turner
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you and the deputy headteacher at the start of the day to consider the school's self-evaluation, discuss improvement since the last inspection and agree the key lines of enquiry for this inspection. During the day, further meetings were held with you, senior and middle leaders and other staff. I met with a group of four governors, including the chair and vice-chair.

Inspectors undertook observations of teaching and learning, accompanied by you or other members of the senior leadership team. We reviewed pupils' work from different key stages. Inspectors held meetings with pupils, as well as speaking informally to them during lessons and around the school.

We reviewed the school's website and a range of school documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans, safeguarding records and the single central record. We also looked at the school's attendance, behaviour and exclusions information. Inspectors took account of responses to questionnaires completed by 55 members of staff and 31 parents, including accompanying written comments.