

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Mrs L Ratcliffe  
Executive headteacher  
Rolph CofE Primary School  
High Street  
Thorpe-le-Soken  
Clacton on Sea  
CO16 0DY

Dear Mrs Ratcliffe

### **Short inspection of Rolph CofE Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 27 September 2016, 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 2010, and subsequently became an academy in January 2014.

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

Since your recent appointment, you have established a strong team of leaders and teachers, many of whom began their time at Rolph this term. The whole team has settled well and the relationships with the pupils are already well developed.

The school had a period of some disruption last term due to promotion and the absence of key leaders. There were a variety of leaders from February 2016, many of whom were interim or acting in their posts. This undoubtedly had an impact on staff and pupils. However, it is clear that this was minimised as much as possible. The appointments you have made this term have ensured that learning is much more secure than during the summer term and pupils have had a very good start to their autumn term. With the establishment of the new and experienced staff in your leadership team, you are in a strong position to continue the improvements you have made since your appointment.

Your evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and what needs improvement, is accurate. You have built on the strengths of the school and launched appropriate and effective strategies for the areas that need to get better. You have already identified leaders to take these priorities forward, and developed further leadership capacity with other schools. Your high expectations are evident. Actions you have put in place, and those which are planned, are reasonable and timely. You have quickly developed a very effective working relationship with the

acting head of school. As a result, the day-to-day leadership of the school is very effective. Parents say the same. One commented: 'My first impressions of the new executive headteacher and head of school are very, very positive'.

The work that you have undertaken to ensure that you have accurate assessment information, and that pupils' progress is well monitored, is paying dividends. From the evidence we reviewed during the inspection, including a thorough scrutiny of pupils' work from last year, it is clear that pupils made good progress in writing and mathematics. There was also evidence of many making more rapid progress, including the most vulnerable pupils in the school. We agreed that there is still a need for further challenge at all levels within a small minority of classes. Pupils told me that sometimes their work has not been challenging enough. They are, however, very keen to learn, very articulate and able. You have already begun to plan times when pupils will work with their parents in school. This will help to ensure that parents receive up-to-date information about what their children are learning and how to support them. The acting head of school has already ensured that the website accurately reflects pupils' weekly homework and the curriculum that each class will be covering each term.

During the last two years, leaders have responded well to ensuring that pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Pupils understand the part they play in their school community. For example, mirroring the parliamentary process, they have petitioned the executive headteacher to become class advocates. They are proud to have additional responsibilities as junior librarians, school council members or lunchtime assistants. The development of pupils' understanding of the needs of their local community and, indeed, communities abroad, is fostered carefully. Activities such as collection and delivery of produce to local, elderly residents, and the development of links with France and Kenya, contribute to pupils being good citizens. Your school's strong Christian values of 'love, faith, forgiveness and respect' are evident in the way that pupils conduct themselves in lessons, in the playground and around the school. As a result, behaviour remains a strength of the school.

You have rightly identified the need to improve pupils' outcomes in English, and in particular reading. Pupils say that they enjoy reading. They get a good start in the Reception and key stage 1 classes, reading regularly to adults. The teaching of phonics is also very effective. As a result, pupils use their phonics skills well in their reading, and outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check have been above the national average for the last three years. However, you recognise that pupils' comprehension skills are not as well developed as they could be. This has challenged some pupils, as can be seen in the unconfirmed 2016 assessments at the end of key stage 2. You have already worked with staff to ensure there is a consistent approach to teaching reading skills and that teachers have a firm grasp of how this improves writing. This was evident in classes seen during my visit. You also recognise that pupils in key stage 2 would benefit from more regular opportunities to read with adults both inside and outside of school. The introduction of 'books and biscuits' has been hugely popular with pupils.

Some pupils' attendance has not been good enough, and especially those who are most vulnerable. Tracking of those pupils is robust and regular. Supported by the local governing body, you work closely with parents of these pupils to remove any barriers to them getting to school regularly and on time. The chair of governors has also sent letters to parents expressing his concern about low attendance. This is beginning to have an impact. Some pupils' attendance has improved. However, you are determined to ensure that all pupils attend school at least in line with the national average and this remains a priority for leaders.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

All safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements. School leaders and governors ensure that robust procedures for the safety and well-being of all pupils are applied with rigour. Training for all staff and governors in safeguarding is regular and fully up to date. School policies are reviewed annually to reflect the latest government guidance, including that to counter radicalisation.

Senior leaders with specific responsibility for child protection work very closely with staff from other agencies when any safeguarding concerns arise. Records related to child protection are of high quality. The progress of the most vulnerable pupils is monitored very closely to ensure that their needs are fully met.

Pupils say that they feel very safe in school because all the teachers and staff care for them. Pupils demonstrate a good awareness of how to keep safe when using the internet both in school and at home. They say that any incidents of bullying and poor behaviour are rare and if they do happen they are quickly dealt with or, as one pupil said, 'As fast as they can'. Inspection evidence seen during my visit confirms this to be so. Although some parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, said that behaviour and bullying incidents were not always addressed, the inspection evidence from a variety of sources, including pupils themselves, does not confirm this. You and your team are committed and determined to ensure that all pupils feel safe at school. One young pupil spoke very articulately about 'going to a bigger kid' if she felt unsafe in any way. This is absolutely the ethos in the school; caring for and protecting each other. The vast majority of parents who responded to Parent View said that their children are happy, safe and enjoy coming to school. Inspection evidence confirms this to be so.

The school's website is compliant. However, some aspects of it are currently being updated to reflect the new leadership of the school and the most recent editions of school policies.

Support from the trust has been appropriate. The chief executive officer recognises that resources the trust put in place to add capacity to the depleted leadership team for the summer term were not sufficient. However, board members took the courageous decision not to appoint to the post until they found a high-calibre substantive executive headteacher. Your appointment has now put the school and the trust in a much more secure position for the future, and is already having a positive impact on pupils and families at Rolph. Partnership within the fast-growing trust is embryonic. However, the effective relationships that you have already

fostered with other schools locally provide partnership, support and challenge to you and your staff.

## **Inspection findings**

- The school has continued to improve since becoming an academy. School leaders make effective use of assessment information to monitor school performance. The progress of pupils is tracked carefully to identify any underachievement and target extra support if it is needed. As a result, all groups of pupils achieve well.
- Over time, pupils make good progress from their starting points, including the most able pupils, those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those pupils who are disadvantaged. In 2014 and 2015, the proportion making the progress expected of pupils their age was above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion exceeding expected progress in writing and mathematics was above the national average, while the proportion in reading was below the national average. Early indications for 2016 results show that pupils' progress was at least in line with the national average in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2.
- During my visit I saw children in the Reception class who had only been in school for two full days. They were settled, playing purposefully inside and outside of the classroom, and have already made good relationships with adults. The children play with and alongside their peers, and also independently. They have regular opportunities to learn through supervised play in a variety of learning experiences. The outdoor provision is used well to develop children's speaking, writing and number skills, as well as their fine and gross motor skills. We saw many children attempting early writing, one ably making a list of what the teaching assistant wanted to order 'for her breakfast'. Adults use questions well to challenge the thinking of these children and ensure that they make good progress. Children go on to achieve a good level of development that is above that seen nationally. They are therefore well prepared for their start in Year 1.
- Scrutiny of pupils' work in writing and mathematics throughout the school evidences that a growing proportion of pupils made good progress during the last academic year. You have ensured that pupils who are at risk of falling behind are identified and appropriate provision put in place. There are some very good examples of teachers giving challenge and support to pupils when they have finished their work. In these growing examples, pupils respond appropriately and improvement can be seen in their subsequent work. However, there are some times when pupils are not challenged enough. You and your leaders have high expectations of presentation of pupils' work in their books. The impact of this is absolutely clear both in lessons and in pupils' work so far this year.
- Pupils throughout the school who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good and often very good progress. Well-trained support staff work closely with these pupils under your guidance and that of teachers. You have, for example, already identified that some children in the current Reception class would benefit from specialist teaching to develop their speech and language. You have accessed appropriate support and ensured that adults are able to continue speech development in the classroom.
- You have made sure that senior leaders are clear about their roles and responsibilities. They are already making a significant contribution to improving

aspects of the school. For example, the introduction of a school handwriting policy, which was much needed, has made a huge difference to pupils' work in their books. Staff constantly remind pupils about their handwriting and the need for their work to be both presentable and clearly legible. Looking at books from last year and those from the beginning of this year, the difference is remarkable.

- Partnership between parents and leaders at the school is growing following a year of many changes in staffing and leadership. Parents are supportive of the school. The responses on Parent View text show that parents are keen to be even more involved in their children's education. This is something that I know you and your head of school are determined to capitalise on, and have begun to plan already. Many parents, some who also took time to write to me, say that they are very impressed with what has been achieved since the beginning of term and within your tenure as executive headteacher. They and governors are confident that the school will continue to improve. Inspection evidence confirms this wholeheartedly.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- reading and comprehension skills are taught consistently well throughout the school with opportunities for pupils to read widely and often, particularly in key stage 2
- there are planned opportunities for further development of the partnership with parents to support their children's learning
- the attendance of the most vulnerable pupils continues to improve and is monitored closely.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local governing body, the chief executive officer of the Vine Trust, and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ruth Brock  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you, the acting head of school and the leader of English. I also met with the chair of the local governing body, and the chief executive officer of the trust. I had a telephone conversation with the vice-chair of the trust. I reviewed a wide range of documentation including policies, attendance information and governing body minutes. Together with your senior leaders, we looked at numerous examples of pupils' work in their English and mathematics books from the last academic year. I observed learning in all classes, many with you. A thorough examination of the

school's safeguarding arrangements was undertaken with the lead for safeguarding. I held a discussion with a group of 10 pupils and with various pupils during their lessons, listening to some of them read. I also reviewed the 41 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 40 free text messages.