

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Miss Catherine McCarthy  
Headteacher  
Houghton Conquest Lower School  
High Street  
Houghton Conquest  
Bedford  
Bedfordshire  
MK45 3LL

Dear Miss McCarthy

### **Short inspection of Houghton Conquest Lower School**

Following my visit to the school on 24 November 2015, 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 September 2010.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your strong desire for all pupils to achieve highly through consistently good teaching and to have equal access to rich, memorable learning experiences comes across strongly and is shared by staff. Pupils' well-being, safety and welfare are equally important in this school; the views of parents, staff and pupils provide compelling evidence that this is the case. They agreed with inspection findings that pupils are happy, safe and well looked after. You are ambitious for pupils to be successful and are incredibly proud of all that the school provides. You know that pupils at Houghton Conquest achieve well, but leaders are always seeking to make further improvements. This is why the school has done so well to sustain and improve above-average standards over time, while tackling successfully all of the recommendations from the last inspection, so that:

- provision in the Reception class has improved impressively
- the proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year has risen year on year and is above the national average
- subject leadership has been strengthened and is effective
- in all classes, pupils work with sustained interest and enthusiasm.

School leaders' accurate view of what is working well and what could be even better, coupled with staff's deep understanding of what switches pupils on to learning, lie at the heart of the school's success. Leaders are passionate about inclusion and equality of opportunity. In addition, good teaching in all classes meets the differing needs and abilities of all pupils so that they make good progress from their starting points. Teachers are quick to spot pupils who have additional learning, behavioural or emotional needs. They are vigilant and diligent in checking that pupils are making enough progress. If they are not, steps are taken swiftly to address their needs by selecting from a wide range of good-quality additional provision that is readily available. Even so, arrangements to double-check teachers' assessment information could be tighter to ensure accuracy. Similarly, the school recognises that more of the most-able pupils should be exceeding expectations for their age. In response, a specially trained teacher 'champion' for the most able is testing out methods and approaches to provide that important extra challenge in everyday teaching for these pupils. Pupils' creativity is not as well developed as it is in other areas of learning.

The school is moving from strength to strength. Since the last inspection, for example:

- the governing body manages the pre-school provision that continues to flourish and is highly sought after, as seen in the long waiting list for places
- standards have risen steadily to exceed age-related expectations in the early years, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 in reading, writing, mathematics, science and physical education
- the after-school clubs programme has been extended, enabling more pupils to participate
- more pupils are taking part in a range of competitive inter-school sporting events
- there are regular opportunities for parents to have their say, put forward their views and support their children's learning at home.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

There are clear management responsibilities in relation to child protection including two lead professionals, known to all staff, to advise and support them. The designated lead professionals liaise with the local authority, health professionals and services for children and families that are external to the school. This ensures that there is no delay in making referrals if needs be and that information is shared among those professionals who require it. All staff are trained to the right level and their training is refreshed regularly, especially when new guidance is released from the Department for Education. Equally, the governing body knows what its responsibilities are and the safeguarding governor monitors the school's work in safeguarding. Work to update systems follows quickly in response to new guidance. However, the governing body is tardy in ensuring that updated policies are uploaded on to the school's website as soon as they have been agreed. Record keeping is of good quality and all of the statutory checks are made during the recruitment process before new staff start work. The same applies to all adults who

work with pupils regularly in school. The headteacher is responsible for arranging provision and for the welfare and well-being of looked after children (those in care or adopted from care) when they join the school to ensure that they achieve well.

## **Inspection findings**

### **Leadership and management**

- School leaders and governors demonstrate strong ambition for pupils to achieve highly. They ensure pupils' access to a broad, balanced curriculum that reflects their interests and provides them with rich learning experiences. The headteacher is particularly skilful in bidding successfully for additional funding to enhance provision for all pupils.
- Staff and governors are immensely proud of the pupils and the school. This came across strongly in all conversations during the inspection and in the results of the staff questionnaire. Almost all staff have confidence in the school's leaders and they are grateful for the opportunities they are given to develop their skills through training and continuous professional development.
- The school's leaders and governors have an accurate view of where the school is and where it needs to go next to achieve outstanding provision and outcomes for pupils. A secure plan for improvement keeps everyone on track in the drive for continuous improvement.
- Thoughtful consideration is given to each pupil's journey through the school in terms of the provision they receive. For example, classroom layout and expectations for independence are appropriate for the ages and stages of pupils' development. They are ready for transfer to middle school at the end of Year 4.
- The school's ethos and values reflect fundamental British values and pupils have a good understanding of them. This helps pupils to mix together very well and enjoy positive experiences at school.
- The role of subject leaders has been developed since the previous inspection. This increases the school's capacity for continuous improvement and has ensured that above-average standards are sustained.
- Systems for gathering information about pupils' progress and attainment are well organised and effective.
- Areas for development identified at the previous inspection have been fully and successfully addressed.
- Less experienced teachers are coached and guided well by those who are more experienced. This enables them to develop as skilful professionals.
- Early intervention and support for vulnerable pupils are strengths and enable disadvantaged pupils and those who are disabled or have special educational needs to make good progress.
- Governors are well informed about achievement and confident in interpreting assessment information.

- Safeguarding systems and arrangements meet requirements and are effective. Nonetheless, the governing body is too slow to update amended policies on to the school's website, so that they are available for parents.
- The school provides a very broad range of extra-curricular activities which enhance pupils' enjoyment of school. Sports funding has been allocated appropriately to increase pupils' participation in a range of sporting activities including competitive inter-school events.
- Pupil premium funding is spent wisely to benefit those for whom it is intended. This is steadily narrowing the gap in their achievement compared with other pupils with similar starting points.
- Communication with parents is improving strongly. There are plentiful opportunities for them to contribute to their children's learning. Information about their children's progress is useful and informative. Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire) responses show that all 37 respondents say their child is happy, feels safe, makes good progress, is well looked after and is taught well.

### **Teaching, learning and assessment**

- Classrooms are well-organised, attractive spaces for pupils to learn in.
- Adults have good relationships with pupils because of their quietly assertive and consistent application of the school's behaviour policy.
- Specific targets are set for learning as well as pupils' attitudes. These are conveyed clearly to parents with encouragement and the expectation that they will support and nurture them at home.
- Conscientious feedback and marking of work helps pupils to improve and teachers have high expectations for the quality of presentation in pupils' written work.
- Outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics are above national averages, throughout the school, reflecting effective teaching in all classes.
- The teaching of phonics is a strength, with almost all pupils achieving the expected standard by the end of Year 1 preparing them well for further development in reading and writing as they move on through the school.
- Extra provision for vulnerable or disadvantaged pupils, such as access to the nurture group, enables them to achieve well.
- Staff are managing the new system for assessment (away from the former National Curriculum levels) capably and they are using it confidently to set appropriate work for individuals and groups. Even so, it will be important to develop further ways of double-checking that the information is accurate.
- Work is underway to add extra challenge in the work for most-able pupils as the school recognises that more of these pupils should be exceeding expectations for their ages.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

- Classrooms are calm and orderly places where pupils concentrate and persevere. Pupils are keen to explain or talk about their work.
- The school has introduced targets for pupils, providing them with clear goals to aim for that will improve their attitudes to learning. These are shared with parents prior to parents' consultation evenings for further discussion.
- Expectations for parents to work in partnership with the school to encourage pupils' good attitudes are explicit.
- In the early years, children show willingness to work and play alongside others and share resources because they are specifically taught how to achieve this.
- Pupils confirmed that everyone gets on well together in school and that it is a happy, welcoming place to be.

## **Outcomes**

- Outcomes are above average in reading, writing and mathematics throughout the school. The 2015 test results have been agreed as accurate by the local authority, as well as outcomes for Years 3 and 4 that exceed expectations.
- Standards in phonics are well above the national average with 94% of Year 1 pupils achieving the expected standard in the phonics screening check in 2015. Standards have risen year on year for the past three years.
- Boys' attainment in mathematics has been significantly above average for two consecutive years.
- Disadvantaged pupils' attainment is generally improving. For example, in mathematics at Key Stage 1, the gap between their attainment and other pupils nationally has narrowed significantly over three years.
- The attainment of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is higher when compared with similar pupils nationally. They are at least two terms ahead of other pupils with special needs nationally in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils also achieve well in science and in physical education. The school has been awarded the primary school quality mark recently in recognition of the high quality of science teaching and outcomes for pupils.
- Pupils' written work (as seen in their exercise books) is presented neatly with well-formed legible handwriting. Most-able pupils do not have enough opportunities and scope to make decisions about setting out their work and showing their workings.

## **Early Years Foundation Stage**

- Pre-school provision is managed effectively by the governing body and school leaders, ensuring that children have access to a broad range of resources and rich experiences inside and outdoors.

- The pre-school leader is expert in managing staffing, ensuring that the right levels of supervision are achieved throughout the day. This is a complex operation given that children arrive and leave at different times during the day in response to parents' requests.
- The proportion of children achieving at least expected outcomes in communication and language, and personal, social and emotional development, is exceptionally high at 100%. Outcomes for creative development are below average.
- All of the early years' requirements for health, safety and welfare are met with extremely good procedures for safeguarding young and vulnerable children, for example through robust procedures for their intimate care.
- Outcomes for boys and girls in the Reception class have improved year on year and are above national averages in all of the prime areas and most others, including for disadvantaged children.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the latest versions of school policies are uploaded onto the school's website without delay
- teachers increase the level of challenge for most-able pupils in all subjects so that they exceed expectations for their age in all subjects
- teachers develop robust systems for checking the accuracy of assessment information about pupils' learning
- the positive start children have in developing their creative skills in pre-school continues into and beyond the Reception Year.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Central Bedfordshire Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Linda Killman  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

- Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) gathered a wide range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This included short observations of lessons, jointly with the headteacher, in all classes; sampling of pupils' current written work; and discussions with leaders about the school's most recent assessment information on pupils' achievement.

- HMI talked to a very wide range of pupils informally in classrooms. The school selected a group of six pupils from Key Stage 2 to give a guided tour of the school at lunchtime and talk about what it is like in school on a typical day.
- HMI held meetings with the headteacher, two senior leaders, three governors and a representative from the local authority.
- HMI looked at a range of documentation including information about the school's self-evaluation and plans for future improvement.
- Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined including mandatory checks made during the recruitment of new staff, arrangements for e-safety (keeping pupils safe online when using electronic media) and risk assessments undertaken for educational visits.
- The view of 37 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) were taken into account as well as results from the staff and pupil online surveys.