

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
www.ofsted.gov.uk



17 June 2016

Mrs Rouane Mendel
Headteacher
The Giles Infant and Nursery School
Durham Road
Stevenage
Hertfordshire
SG1 4JQ

Dear Mrs Mendel

Short inspection of The Giles Infant and Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 11 May 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 June 2011.

This school continues to be good.

Since your appointment after the last inspection, you have worked tirelessly to improve the overall quality of teaching, curriculum provision and outcomes for pupils at this school. Working in partnership with the governing body, you have built a strong team of teachers and support staff who are well trained and feel valued. They say that their training needs are fully catered for and this contributes very effectively to school improvement. Many parents say that the school is a happy community where their children are very well cared for and make good progress. Inspection evidence confirms this to be so.

You have regularly monitored the quality of teaching and learning with the support of other senior leaders and teachers who have subject responsibility. The findings are used to identify what needs to be further improved. Key priorities for action are clear within the detailed plan for school improvement. Your records show that much of the teaching across the school is good or outstanding and an improvement on the last inspection. Inspection evidence seen during my visit confirms this to be so.

You have rightly identified the need to improve pupils' outcomes in English and mathematics. Training for all staff in the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) is leading to improvements in teaching and learning in these early reading skills. Pupils' outcomes are improving but they are not consistently higher than the national average in the Year 1 phonics screening check. This is because some inconsistencies in the teaching of phonics still exist. Furthermore, the most able pupils in Year 2 continue to make grammatical errors in their writing and spelling.

As a result, outcomes are not outstanding at the end of key stage 1 in writing and English overall.

Your strong leadership and high expectations have established a very positive and inclusive environment for learning throughout the school. Your promotion of the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The promotion of British values is very evident in assemblies, whole-school 'mock' elections and the work of the school council. Through your integration of pupils from the speech and language unit into the classes within the school, these pupils make good and sometimes rapid progress in a wide range of basic skills and personal development. The establishment of direct links with a village school in Ghana provides all pupils with outstanding opportunities to learn about the culture and lifestyle of other children in the world. Such activities are a significant improvement on the findings of the last inspection.

You have worked closely with subject leaders to devise an exciting and vibrant curriculum for all the pupils. As a result, pupils are very keen to be at school, and attendance has continued to improve to broadly average levels. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is outstanding as a result of the excellent provision.

Pupils in Year 2 say that they feel very safe in school because all the teachers and staff care for them. These 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 very rare and if they do happen they are quickly dealt with. Inspection evidence seen during my visit confirm this to be so.

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.

Inspection findings

- School leaders and governors make effective use of data and progress 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, gaps in achievement for disadvantaged pupils are diminishing in reading, writing and mathematics in line with similar pupils nationally.

- All pupils make good progress overall from low starting points in the Nursery to attain outcomes that are just above those seen nationally at the end of key stage 1. Scrutiny of the pupils' books in Year 2 confirms that the most able pupils make outstanding progress in mathematics. This is because work is challenging and provides good opportunities for them to master new mathematical skills through problem solving. However, in their marking and feedback, teachers do not always identify mistakes made by these pupils in punctuation, grammar and spelling. As a result, errors are often repeated.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability make good and often very good progress. Well-trained support staff work closely with these pupils under the guidance of teachers and the special educational needs coordinator. Staff from the speech and language unit provide these pupils with very specific individual support or work closely with them in class alongside other pupils. This support is very effective and sometimes leads to pupils having their support withdrawn in key stage 2 because of the outstanding progress they have made at this school.
- Teachers and support staff work in close partnership to provide a stimulating and creative curriculum for all pupils. Topics such as 'Cold places' provide pupils in Year 2 with good opportunities to develop their geographical skills and historical knowledge through the study of the Inuit culture and Scott's expedition to the Antarctic. Book weeks and local trips to places of worship provide good opportunities for further curriculum enrichment.
- The outdoor provision for children in the Nursery and Reception classes is outstanding. These children have regular opportunities to learn through supervised play in a variety of learning experiences such as the 'enchanted garden' and the 'wild area'. Adults use questions well to challenge the thinking of these children and ensure that they make good progress. Scrutiny of the children's learning journals confirms that all these children make good progress from a low starting point. Children go on to achieve a good level of development overall that is above that seen nationally before they start Year 1.
- Governors work in very close partnership with the headteacher, other senior leaders and those teachers with a subject responsibility to improve the outcomes for pupils, narrow gaps in achievement and enhance the overall provision both inside the classrooms and in the school environment. Regular monitoring visits are made to the school. As a result, the governing body has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and what needs to be improved further.
- A strong partnership exists between governors, school leaders and the parent community. Many parents say that they are very impressed with what has been achieved since the last inspection and how easy it is to communicate with the headteacher and staff if they have a concern.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- any inconsistencies in the teaching of phonics are eliminated in order to improve outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check
- the accuracy of pupils' writing in Year 2 is improved by addressing grammatical errors and spelling mistakes.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Hertfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Philip Mann
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Meetings were held with you and the assistant headteacher. A meeting was held with the teacher in charge of the specialist speech and language unit and the special needs coordinator. Further meetings were held with teachers with middle leadership responsibility, the chair of the governing body and four other governors, and a representative from the local authority. I reviewed a wide range of documentation and jointly observed teaching and learning in all classes with you and the assistant headteacher. A thorough examination of the school's safeguarding arrangements was undertaken. Discussions were also held with a group of pupils from Year 2 about their work. I met with a number of parents at the school gate. I also reviewed the 77 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 26 free text messages. Twenty-six responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and 25 responses to the pupils' survey were also considered.