

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



4 July 2016

Mrs Catherine Smart
Potton Lower School
Everton Road
Potton
Sandy
Bedfordshire
SG19 2PB

Dear Mrs Smart

Short inspection of Potton Lower School

Following my visit to the school on 7 June 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 October 2010.

This school continues to be good.

Since your appointment, you have worked with energy and determination to ensure that teaching and learning continually improve and outcomes for pupils rise to keep pace with, and indeed exceed, the increase that has taken place in national standards. For the past three years, the overall attainment of pupils at the end of key stage 1 has been sustained at significantly above the national average. Standards in writing are particularly high. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 consolidate these standards and are well prepared to move to the middle school.

The move in September 2015 to work more closely with Burgoyne Middle School, with you as the executive headteacher of both schools, is establishing shared expectations for high standards across the schools' community. Importantly, new appointments have been made and leadership responsibilities reallocated to ensure that Potton Lower School sustains and builds further on the outcomes pupils achieve as this change is managed. For example, you have appointed a new deputy headteacher to lead the improvement of teaching and learning, and a key stage 2 leader. These staff will work across both schools to sustain the pace and quality of pupils' learning and behaviour.

Governors recognise that the rigour you have brought to the analysis and development of the school's work has provided the level of information they need to effectively challenge and support leaders' work. They have a robust understanding of the strengths of the school's work and of the areas that still need to improve if you are all to achieve your aim for the school to be judged to be outstanding at its next inspection.

Leaders work together extremely well. A particular strength in their work is their shared sense of accountability for ensuring that improvement happens. While each established leader has a detailed knowledge of their own area of responsibility, they also have an excellent grasp of the wider priorities. The depth of shared commitment they have to ensuring that pupils achieve as well as they can significantly increases the pace of improvement. Your work to identify and develop potential leaders is successful in ensuring that the quality of leadership is sustained over time.

Leaders analyse in detail the progress made by individual pupils and by different groups. The inclusion manager maintains comprehensive records of the support provided when pupils are at risk of falling behind. The pupil premium (additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils) is used well to provide the activities and intervention pupils need and, as a result, their progress is increased. Because of this extra support, gaps between the attainment of disadvantaged children in the early years and their classmates close as pupils move through the school. Occasionally in lessons, the work for pupils who need extra support is not planned specifically enough to enable them to make the rapid small steps in progress they need to.

At the previous inspection, improving key stage 1 pupils' correct use of punctuation and sentence structure and key stage 2 pupils' use of parts of speech to enliven their writing and, encouraging pupils to use their writing skills in different subjects were identified as aspects of the school's work that needed to improve. You have invested in resources to help improve how writing is taught and made sure that all staff have received training to improve the quality of their work. As a result, pupils write particularly well. In a Year 2 lesson, pupils were writing enthusiastically encouraged by music, drama and additional activities designed to enhance their use and understanding of adjectives. Because learning was carefully planned and pupils were excited by their lesson, they made very good progress. Many pupils write confidently and fluently. They include interesting detail in their work and use their skills very effectively in both imaginative and factual writing. Pupils' writing across a range of subjects, particularly in key stage 1, is of a very high standard. It is still developing to match these high standards in Years 3 and 4. In a very small number of instances, where pupils lack confidence or have not developed the key skills they need to write well, they make less progress.

Pupils say their work is 'really interesting'. They enjoy learning about 'new and different things' through a rich, well-considered curriculum which is enhanced by a wide range of clubs including the popular, award-winning choir. Subjects are carefully linked and pupils are encouraged to explore how to use their developing skills to help them find out new information and to present their work. The curriculum helps them to learn about the wider world and through this, too, they

develop understanding of different values. They understand, for example, what the British values of tolerance and democracy mean. Good use is made of the primary physical education and sport funding to enrich the range of sporting opportunities for pupils and to ensure that teaching is of high quality.

Views recorded on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, show that the vast majority of parents are increasingly positive about the work of the school. Written comments in response to the inspection demonstrate that most parents have confidence in the school's work. They feel their children are interested in their learning and nurtured as individuals. For example: 'This is a fantastic school. It is friendly, safe, and supportive and every child is valued. My child has made such good progress since starting last year and loves coming to school. The lessons are fun and exciting. There are lots of opportunities to see your child's work and the teachers are all very friendly, approachable and understanding. This really is a wonderful, happy school.'

Safeguarding is effective.

Procedures for making checks on staff's suitability to work with children are appropriate. Information is kept up to date so that leaders can be certain that all staff have received training and can make sure that if there are any concerns about staff or pupils, they are effectively recorded and addressed. Governors are trained in staff recruitment, and personnel records are thoroughly maintained showing that references are followed up and all necessary checks are made. Governors visit regularly to review safeguarding records and to check that the health and safety requirements for the school site are met. Fire drills and serious incident procedures are practised and their efficiency is reported to governors regularly.

Inspection findings

- Since the previous inspection, the headteacher has ensured that all staff have high aspirations for pupils and that they receive the specific support and training they need to enable pupils to achieve well.
- Leaders' improvement planning addresses the right priorities because self-evaluation is based on monitoring which is both rigorous and accurate. Actions are carefully thought through and are well timed. Collaborative work with other local schools in the Pinnacle Trust enables leaders to check their own work and use other practice to support staff to develop. For example, staff work together to test out the accuracy of assessment.
- Most children start in Reception with skills and abilities that are typical for their age. Some are above and a small number below. Developing the early years is a priority for leaders and changes have been made to how this aspect of the school's work is led. Analysis shows that provision does not offer sufficiently creative and engaging opportunities, across the areas of learning, for children to independently use the new skills they are acquiring. Most pupils make expected progress and in 2015 a larger proportion than nationally attained a good level of development. The good progress pupils make in Year 1 shows that pupils have developed the key skills necessary to move on in their learning.

- In 2015, the proportion of pupils attaining expected standards in the phonics screening check dipped to be in line with the national average. The immediate response from leaders identified that the way pupils were supported to blend letter sounds together needed further focus. This, and closer monitoring of how well pupils are doing, has very quickly improved standards which are again in line with those attained in previous years. Pupils use these skills in their reading and writing very confidently.
- The assessment leader uses assessment information to track pupils' progress carefully. Analysis shows that pupils across the school are on track to meet the demands of the most recently introduced national curriculum. In the majority of classes, teachers use assessment information to match activities to pupils' learning needs very specifically so they make good progress. Where this work does not match the very high standards set by leaders, appropriate support is in place.
- The English subject leader has capably led the improvement of pupils' writing and reading skills. Pupils have a good knowledge of different texts and authors, and speak enthusiastically about reading. The leader's recent analysis has identified discrepancies in how teachers give feedback to pupils and their families about how their reading skills are developing. Rapid action has been taken to address this so that work across the school improves to match the best. This rigorous analysis and action demonstrates the strong capacity of leaders to improve the school's work.
- Pupils make good progress in mathematics because their understanding is developed well. Where teaching is best, pupils are encouraged through careful questioning to recall and use their previous learning before they move on to new areas of work. In a small number of instances, essential understanding is not taught as thoroughly as it is in most. However, teachers are being well supported to develop their skills. More pupils than nationally attained above age-related expectations in mathematics in 2015. Leaders are not complacent and have employed a mathematics specialist to further increase the challenge for the most able pupils so that the high standards achieved in literacy are matched in mathematics.
- Pupils say they benefit from the feedback and advice they receive from teachers in their lessons. They describe marking as like 'text messages you read and reply to'. All teachers assess and mark pupils' work in line with the school's policy. The impact of this varies because the quality of advice pupils are given varies. Leaders know where it is not strong and are taking action to make sure it is all of the same high quality.
- Robust procedures are in place to support pupils who have special educational needs or disability. The inclusion manager is conscientious in ensuring that the school knows as much as possible about pupils' needs. Records of progress and plans for learning are detailed and pupils with statements or education, health and care plans are fully engaged in reviewing the support they receive and how well it is working. Staff are expected to review their own teaching and identify what does and does not work in helping pupils to learn. Analysis of progress is detailed and shows that most pupils make good progress from their starting points. In a small number of instances, the support provided for pupils is not specific enough to help them learn quickly. Pastoral support for pupils and their families is

strong, which is improving progress and reducing pupils' absence.

- Leaders have worked hard to ensure that pupils respect others and understand the different values they are expected to learn. Pupils talk avidly about the responsibilities they are given and take these seriously. They develop positive attitudes to their learning and try hard to succeed. They are well prepared for the move to middle school. During the inspection, pupils said they were enjoying the opportunities they are being given this year to visit and work at the middle school. The new leadership arrangements are improving the continuity of education for pupils as they move between the schools.
- Pupils understand the school's behaviour policy. They know how good behaviour is rewarded and also understand when and why sanctions are used. During breaks, pupils play together harmoniously and enjoy the wide range of apparatus and opportunities available in the spacious grounds. Pupils understand the different forms of bullying and how to keep themselves safe when they use the internet. They do not think bullying occurs in school and feel there are adults in school they can talk to if they experience difficulties. Pupils think that, occasionally, adults take longer than necessary to respond to issues when behaviour does not meet expectations.
- The chair of the governing body ensures that governors' understanding of the school's work is accurate through regular meetings with you and the school improvement partner who provides an external, independent evaluation. Governors know that work is moderated across the Pinnacle Trust, which gives them confidence that the school is managing new systems of assessment accurately and effectively. They are robust in supporting you and in ensuring they have the information they need to challenge, or ask questions of, leaders when necessary.
- The school's website is not up to date because it is currently under reconstruction to present information for the federation, and for both schools, more efficiently. A very small number of parents feel that communication could be more effective.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- Provision in the early years gives children access to a wide range of interesting creative activities which excite them and enable them to use the new skills they are learning independently.
- Plans to improve all teaching to match the best are continually developed so that the high standards achieved in key stage 1 are further built on as pupils progress through Years 3 and 4.
- Targets set for pupils who need extra support to catch up are specific and short term so that they make frequent small steps in learning and progress quickly.

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

Prue Rayner
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, the English and assessment leader, the inclusion manager, the office manager, four governors and a group of pupils. I also spoke to the school improvement partner by phone. I took account of the 79 responses to Parent View and 24 text responses received on the day of the inspection. I scrutinised a range of school documentation, including safeguarding documents, leaders' evaluations and development planning, evidence from the monitoring of teaching and behaviour, assessment information and records of governors' meetings. I visited classes with leaders and spoke to pupils about their learning and behaviour. Pupils' work from different year groups and in different subjects was scrutinised.