

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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19 July 2016

Mrs Tania Johnson  
Headteacher  
Horringer Court Middle School  
Glastonbury Road  
Bury St Edmunds  
Suffolk  
IP33 2EX

Dear Mrs Johnson

### **Short inspection of Horringer Court Middle School**

Following my visit to the school on 14 June 2016 with Andy Hemmings, 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 February 2013.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

At Horringer Court Middle School, you and your team put pupils at the heart of your work. You are all committed to ensuring that pupils achieve well, both academically and personally. Pupils are curious, courteous and keen to learn. They are positive about their experiences at Horringer Court Middle School. As one pupil said, 'We respect the teachers and they respect us.' Pupils comment that staff 'challenge you to get better at things, as well as being kind'. They say that teachers have high expectations and help pupils to do their best. This makes the school a harmonious, happy and motivated learning environment.

Since the previous inspection, overall standards of attainment have risen in line with national expectations. In mathematics, standards at the end of key stage 2 have increased at a faster rate than nationally and in 2015 were broadly average. Published key stage 2 results suggest that the progress that pupils make is not as good as it should be. However, this information does not take into account pupils' starting points when they join the school in Year 5. Externally moderated tests that pupils undertake when they join the school, and school information for each year group, show that by the time pupils reach Year 8, they have made good progress in their time at Horringer Court Middle School.

You know that, although overall standards have been improving, some pupils did not achieve well enough last year by the end of Year 6, most notably in reading, and grammar, punctuation and spelling. You have taken effective action to improve these areas. This includes a renewed whole-school focus on grammar, punctuation and spelling, additional reading time and one-to-one tailored support programmes. The influence of these strategies is already evident in the improvements that pupils across the school are making.

Well supported by your effective deputy headteacher, you have responded well to difficulties in recruiting teachers when vacancies arise. Staffing in some areas of the core curriculum has been a challenge. You have ensured that where you have had to fill vacancies temporarily, you have recruited high-quality permanent teaching staff as quickly as possible to minimise disruption to pupils' learning. Pupils in Years 6 and 7 say that disruption to their learning has now been eradicated and that they have permanent teachers almost all of the time.

Leaders of English and mathematics have been instrumental in improving the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement and have used the additional time that you have given them this year productively. They have been especially successful in their work on improving the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. This is an area you have rightly identified as a high priority, particularly for those who entered the school with low prior attainment. Middle leaders give very specific guidance to teachers about meeting the needs of pupils so that they can achieve as well as their classmates. Gaps in pupils' learning are also being closed because they are given the right help and support. For example, teachers provide booster sessions in their specialist subjects and individual pupils receive one-to-one support, targeted to meet their specific needs. This is closing gaps in disadvantaged pupils' achievement in all year groups. You are still refining some assessment and monitoring systems so that you can bring together all the information that you have on pupils' progress in one centralised place. This will help you to sharpen up your work in measuring the effects of your actions more efficiently and precisely.

Your appointment of a new special educational needs coordinator last year, and of an additional Year 5 specialist teacher this year, is making a real difference to the pupils in your care. Evidence seen by inspectors clearly shows that these pupils are now having their needs accurately identified. Pupils' needs are precisely met through a range of different services, including speech and language therapy, dyslexia support and one-to-one mentoring and coaching. As a result of this, and the monitoring of their learning in lessons, these pupils are making good progress from their individual starting points.

Pupils appreciate the wealth of opportunities open to them at Horringer Court Middle School. 'Beliefs and values' lessons, assemblies and tutor time activities give pupils a view of the wider world and ensure that they are considerate and respectful of the differences between people. This curriculum, including a number of extra-curricular opportunities, brings exciting chances for pupils to develop skills in new areas and a confidence about their abilities. Access to these areas and skilful

organisation by staff, mean that these opportunities are raising pupils' aspirations about what they can and want to achieve in the future.

Governors bring a breadth of expertise to the governing body and school. Consequently, they are well placed to offer precise challenge to school leaders. The work of the chair of governors with the trust partnership is ensuring that there is clear communication between the trust and the school. Governors visit the school regularly and use this information to confirm the evaluations made by leaders. However, governor minutes suggest that not all governors are equally rigorous in the challenge that they pose to the school over the information that they receive.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The record of checks on the suitability of staff to work with children is fully maintained and meets statutory requirements. Training for staff is up to date and ensures that they know what to do if they have concerns. Staff are confident in the school processes to report concerns, and do so effectively when required. Referrals are timely and leaders are tenacious both in their follow-up work with external agencies and in the recording of it. Governors are well trained and aware of their statutory responsibilities. They ensure that safeguarding procedures are effective. Pupils are taught how to stay safe through a well thought out curriculum which enables them to understand risks, both online and in their day-to-day life. They refer their worries to staff and are very confident that they will deal with these effectively. However, there are examples where leaders are not as meticulous in reviewing and updating the school's policies and paperwork. This does not reflect the strong ethos and culture of safeguarding in the school.

### **Inspection findings**

- Leaders know the school well and have the capacity to continue to develop it further. They know the strengths and the areas for improvement and have identified the right priorities to continue to improve the school. They are constantly refining their skills in monitoring pupils' progress and in analysing the difference that their work is making to pupils' learning. Leaders acknowledge that further work is still required to make aspects of this monitoring more efficient and precise.
- For the last three years, pupils' overall attainment at the end of key stage 2 has been rising and in 2015 was broadly average. Leaders have been rigorous in their approach to supporting the pupils in Year 7 who did not attain the required standard in Year 6. Consequently, these pupils are rapidly catching up, especially in their standards of grammar, punctuation and spelling.
- Leaders have checked that teachers' assessments of the progress that pupils make are accurate. They have made great efforts to ensure that assessment is accurate in preparation for new assessment requirements in 2016. They have undertaken appropriate work with colleagues from local high-performing schools and supported the leader for English to be a national curriculum tests assessor. School assessment information, and evidence

seen on inspection, demonstrates that current pupils are making good progress and that overall the school's performance continues to rise.

- Pupils in key stage 3 achieve well. Work in lessons and that seen in the work scrutinised during the inspection indicates that many pupils make good progress across a wide range of subjects, and sometimes even better in mathematics. This is due to the effective teaching that they receive. Pupils develop skills and knowledge that mean that they are very well prepared for the next stage of their learning.
- Where there are weaknesses in pupils' learning and progress, leaders have acted on this and made improvements. Work to reduce gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and their peers is making a difference so that gaps in attainment in key stage 2 and 3 are closing quickly.
- The progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is good. Pupils, often from disadvantaged backgrounds, with very low starting points who face many complex barriers to their learning are nurtured and supported to make rapid improvements in their academic and personal development. Since the previous inspection, the appointment of a very capable leader for special educational needs has ensured that this work takes high priority in the school. These pupils receive consistently effective support across the school as their needs are precisely met in each class.
- The most able pupils, including those who are from disadvantaged backgrounds, are making good progress. By the end of Year 6 the proportion of pupils who achieve the higher levels in writing is above the national average. By the time they leave Year 8, they have made good progress from their starting points.
- Parents are very positive about their children's experiences in the school. A high number of pupils join the school at points throughout the academic year rather than in September. Parents and pupils spoke very positively about how the school helped them to settle quickly. The progress of these pupils is good. This is because thorough induction processes ensure that these pupils receive specific support which allows them to flourish. One pupil who joined part-way through this year commented to inspectors: 'I feel like I've always been here.' The additional classes and one-to-one support these pupils are given mean that they catch up with their classmates quickly.
- Attendance in 2015 was below the national average. Attendance for all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, has improved. Leaders are tenacious in their efforts to improve the attendance of a few pupils who are persistently absent, sometimes for very complex reasons. Leaders work well to support families and to work with external agencies to improve pupils' attendance where there are concerns.
- Staff have worked diligently with the Bury All-Through Trust to create a new curriculum and assessment system. Teachers have benefited from working with colleagues from a number of local schools. One staff member commented very positively on the network of schools, saying that they felt that Horringer is 'one campus' in an all through-school. Colleagues across all

subjects, but particularly in English, mathematics and science, are sharing subject specialist expertise and resources effectively. This partnership is working together thoughtfully to establish a cross-phase curriculum and an assessment 'route planner'. This is being used with increasing confidence by teachers to ensure that pupils are ready for the next stage of their education. The cross-phase key stage 3 work between the schools means that by the time they reach Year 8, pupils have acquired the skills, knowledge, resilience and confidence necessary to prepare them very well for secondary school.

- The broad and balanced curriculum also includes an array of after-school clubs such as art, gardening, Spanish and extensive dance and sports opportunities. All pupils take part in regular dance performances and say that they love these opportunities to perform. Many pupils also have their studies enriched through links with the trust schools. Recent events such as 'Africa day', dance festivals, history days and science fayres, are just some of the chances that pupils get to visit other schools or to attend trips to areas of interest. This is particularly true for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Governors have received training on their roles and responsibilities but not all are as effective as the best. Together they bring to the school a wide a range of relevant expertise to support the school in its work. The chair of the governing body works with the trust board to make sure that the school is well represented and its needs identified. Governors visit the school regularly so that they can assure themselves of the accuracy of some of the information that they receive. Some governors are not confident to challenge the school over the information they gain.
- The work of the trust is contributing to the ongoing improvements being made at the school. The trust has arranged high-quality staff training, school improvement checks by external bodies and a range of rich curriculum experiences for pupils. The partnership between Horringer Court and the trust is supporting leaders at all levels to be more effective in improving the standards of education for pupils.
- The school now meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website. However, leaders do not always update this quickly with the most recent policies or documents.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they are meticulous in reviewing and revising essential school policies so that they are up to date and reflect the good practice that already exists in the school; leaders should ensure that these policies are available on the school's website
- monitoring systems are centralised, ensuring that leaders can analyse the difference that they are making to pupil outcomes efficiently and precisely
- all school governors are equally rigorous in the challenge that they offer to leaders over the information that they receive.

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

Yours sincerely

Kim Pigram  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, leaders for English, mathematics, physical education, art, dance and pastoral care, the vice-chair of the governing body, two groups of pupils and a representative from the trust. You and your senior team accompanied us to visit classes and we looked at a range of pupils' work together. Inspectors also spoke to staff and pupils. Inspectors looked at an array of documentation including information about safeguarding, pupils' assessment information and the school's self-evaluation and action planning. Inspectors took account of 82 responses to Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents) and 26 responses to the staff survey.