

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



27 October 2016

Fiona O'Reilly
Headteacher
Holtspur School
Cherry Tree Road
Holtspur
Beaconsfield
Buckinghamshire
HP9 1BH

Dear Mrs O'Reilly

Short inspection of Holtspur School

Following my visit to the school on 6 October 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 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has upheld the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school is a welcoming, happy place. Pupils and parents are proud of the school and the sense of community. They value the importance placed on creative and practical as well as academic learning. Outdoor learning is a strength of the school. The school site is rich with opportunities, with areas to play and explore, including a wildlife pond, orchard and sensory garden. Pupils enjoy learning in 'the nest', a recently built, well-equipped space for science, art and project work placed in the school grounds. Staff know their pupils well and plan and teach sophisticated lessons that engage pupils' interest and cater well for varying abilities. Pupils conduct themselves well around the school site and in the canteen, where the atmosphere is calm and orderly. Pupils show respect to adults and one another. They are keen to talk, and have well-developed social skills. Parents comment on how pupils of different ages look after one another and get along. Pupils benefit from a wide range of activities after school, including Lego, French, computing and samba clubs, as well as several sports clubs and a choir. Pupils leave well prepared for secondary school.

When last inspected, the inspectors noted the many strengths of the school, including leadership, teaching, pupils' achievement and behaviour. The inspectors identified one area for specific attention. This was to improve pupils' writing skills by providing them with frequent opportunities to apply and develop their writing skills across the curriculum. Leaders have tackled this successfully. Teachers plan

interesting writing tasks with just the right support for pupils of varying ability. They provide extra challenge for the most able and more structured tasks for lower-attaining pupils. This helps these pupils gain the confidence to get started with their writing and make good progress. Pupils write with increasing sophistication as they move through the school and achieve well.

Since your promotion from deputy to headteacher in April, you have built on the school's many strengths and tackled areas of relative weakness. You took the bold decision to change the assessment approach introduced last year so it would provide better information about pupils' progress. At present, although teachers know about the achievement of pupils in their class, your system for pulling this information together remains a work in progress. Consequently, leaders and governors do not, at present, have a sharp understanding of current pupils' achievement. You recognise the importance of having the improved system fully operational for mathematics and English this term. You are on track to achieve this. Developing the system to track pupils' achievement in other subjects is an important next step.

Over the last two years, a notable number of children in Reception have not developed their phonics and writing skills well enough. This had a knock-on effect on pupils' skills in using phonics in Year 1. Leaders are working effectively to tackle this, making sure staffing is strong and that pupils have increased opportunities to develop their phonics and writing skills right from the start. You have changed the approach to teaching phonics and writing in early years and key stage 1, introducing a scheme that has proved successful in other schools. Wisely, you have made sure that staff are suitably trained to use the new scheme. Leaders are checking that plans for teaching meet expectations. As a result, pupils in Reception have made a good start with their reading and writing this year. Nevertheless, it is early days and it is too soon to see the full impact of the changes. You recognise that leaders need to maintain a tight focus to ensure the changes lead to strong progress in reading and writing in Reception and Year 1.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have made sure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Checks and records on the suitability of staff are sound. Staff are well trained and fully aware of what to do if they have any concerns. They know the signs to look out for that may suggest a pupil is at risk of harm. You make sure that any significant concerns about a pupil are passed swiftly to the local authority, with which you then work in partnership to support the pupil. The governor for safeguarding meets with you termly to check everything is in order. A full safeguarding audit takes place annually. Regular health and safety checks are also carried out, so any area for attention can be dealt with.

Pupils say they feel safe in school. They learn to keep safe online and in the world. Bullying is rare and there is no sign of prejudiced behaviour. Pupils say occasionally there are incidents of unkindness but when they tell staff these are resolved.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have worked effectively to set up an engaging curriculum. It successfully promotes the joy of developing practical and creative skills and learning outdoors, as well as academic study. As a result, pupils typically learn well across subjects.
- Last autumn, leaders started setting up a new approach to assessing, collecting and evaluating information about pupils' achievement in English and mathematics. This system did not provide enough information for leaders about pupils' progress. Sensibly, on taking up post in April, you decided to adjust the system to tackle this. This new system is in development and will be fully in use shortly. Meanwhile, leaders do not have the information needed to gain a precise understanding of how well each group of pupils is achieving in English and mathematics. Additionally, leaders have not yet fully determined how pupils' achievement in other subjects will be assessed and evaluated.
- Pupils currently in the school achieve well in writing. They typically write with sophistication and confidence. They draw on their increasingly well-developed vocabulary and sound understanding of grammar to write engaging pieces. Provisional national data for 2016 shows the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard was well above the national figure at key stage 1. On average, pupils made progress in line with the national figure by the end of key stage 2. The proportion reaching and exceeding the expected standard at key stage 2 was also average. The proportion exceeding the expected standard at key stage 1 was a little low. Leaders attribute this, at least in part, to overcautious assessment. The accomplished writing seen during the inspection, produced by pupils now in Year 3, indicates this is likely to be the case.
- The most able pupils in the school typically make strong progress in English and mathematics. A notably high proportion exceeded the expected standard at the end of key stage 2 in 2016 in mathematics, reading and spelling, punctuation and grammar tests. Typically, the most able achieve well in other subjects too because teachers provide tasks with suitable stretch and challenge.
- Disadvantaged pupils typically make good progress. Teachers have the same high expectation of these pupils as they do of others in the class. The most able of this group read and write with flair. They are prepared well for secondary school.
- Leaders keep a close eye on pupil premium spending to make sure it is supporting disadvantaged pupils. A detailed report to governors indicates the support provided for each child in the last year and provides some evaluation of the impact of that support on each pupil's progress. However, this report does not enable leaders and governors to gain an incisive understanding of the overall impact of the spending. This is because the method used to evaluate achievement does not consider well enough the starting points for each pupil and the progress they have made.
- The proportion meeting the expected standards in the phonics screening check dipped in 2016, having been in line with the national average for the previous three years. Leaders are getting to grips with this. Leaders recognised the previous approach had been a little disjointed. New leadership for phonics and a new phonics scheme, coupled with suitable staff training, is helping ensure

phonics is well taught. Year 2 pupils who are behind are getting helpful intensive support to catch up. However, it is too soon to see the full impact of this work on pupils' achievement.

- Leaders have strengthened the teaching of phonics and early writing skills in Reception to tackle a dip in performance. Pupils are benefiting from increased opportunities to write and make links between the letters they are learning to write and the associated phonic. Several parents commented on the bright start their children had made with their literacy. Nevertheless, the changes are quite new. Leaders recognise the importance of keeping a close eye on Reception to ensure the new approaches are increasingly effective and that the most able are sufficiently challenged. A local authority officer is being brought in to support this.
- The school meets the requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the school's assessment and tracking system enables a sharp understanding of exactly how well each group of pupils is achieving in each subject and supports incisive evaluation of the impact of the curriculum and teaching on pupils' achievement
- changes to teaching phonics and writing in early years and key stage 1 lead to strong achievement in English for all groups of children and pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Diana Choulerton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you at the start of the day. We discussed your evaluation of the school's effectiveness and agreed the key areas we would focus on during the inspection. These included: considering the impact of leaders' work to improve the teaching of writing; exploring how well the school meets the needs of the most able pupils and those who are disadvantaged; looking at how successfully the school's new curriculum and related assessment approaches have been implemented and exploring the impact of leaders' recent work to improve phonics and writing in Reception and Year 1.

During the day, I held further discussions with you and other leaders. I met the vice-chair of the governing body and two other governors. We visited parts of seven lessons. I scrutinised a selection of pupils' English and wider subject work. I listened to pupils read to you and discuss their reading. I took account of 11 staff survey responses, four responses to the pupil survey and 86 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. In addition, I considered 45 parent responses by free text. I spoke with some parents at the start of school and with pupils and staff at lunchtime. I analysed a range of the school's documentation, including leaders' checks on pupils' progress and safeguarding policies and procedures.