

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Ms Sandra La Porta
Middlewich Primary School
Park Road
Middlewich
Cheshire
CW10 9BS

Dear Ms La Porta

Short inspection of Middlewich Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 18 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 September 2011.

This school continues to be good.

You and your leadership team have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Along with staff and governors, you provide strong direction to ensure that the school develops well-rounded young people who are well prepared for the next stage of their education. British values are at the core of the school so that pupils understand equality, diversity, justice and democracy from an early age. This is reflected in their behaviour, attitudes to learning and in the harmonious relationships throughout the school. Children who have a hearing impairment are well supported to access a full curriculum alongside their peers.

Parents appreciate the work that leaders and staff do to foster good attitudes to learning. One parent wrote, 'I feel both my children have flourished since attending this school. There is a great support system for children to help them to get up to speed in class.' Pupils also express highly positive views about all aspects of school life and enjoy not only lessons but the additional activities and the responsibilities provided by the school.

Areas for improvement at the last inspection included raising attainment in English and mathematics further by increasing the pace and challenge in lessons and enhancing the provision in the early years by providing wider opportunities for children to explore and investigate when learning outdoors. A significant improvement in the outcomes for children in the early years and the improvement in reading and mathematics, evidenced by test results and work in pupils' books, indicate that you have acted successfully upon these priorities.

Outcomes have improved since the last inspection; the proportion of early years children to achieve a good level of development and the proportion of pupils to achieve the phonics standards are now well above the national average. Outcomes at key stage 1 are at, or well above, national averages in reading, mathematics and science. At key stage 2, outcomes are broadly average for the majority of pupils.

You are aware that boys do not achieve as well as girls in the early years and at key stage 1. As a result, you are taking actions to accelerate the progress of boys in Reception and in Years 1 and 2. Similarly, you have been determined to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils at key stage 2. Pleasingly, in 2016, their outcomes were similar to those of other pupils nationally in reading, mathematics and grammar, punctuation and spelling.

Reading in the school is strong, and pupils are encouraged to read for pleasure and to tackle challenging texts of classics, for example. This year, leaders have introduced additional strategies to improve the quality of writing in all subjects as outcomes and progress were below average in both key stages in 2016. The achievement of the most able pupils at key stage 2, in all subjects, remains an area that leaders are addressing with renewed focus.

All pupils benefit from a wide range of enrichment activities that the school provides, including a range of sports and after-school clubs, visits and residential trips. Additional educational trips to local and national museums engage pupils. A regular trip to Nantwich, for example, links the great fire there with pupils' study of the Fire of London. Furthermore, Year 5 pupils work with an outside company to stage a Shakespeare play. This work has resulted, this year, in an extensive display of their work on 'King Lear'. The curriculum promoting personal development is a strength of the school, fostering a broad understanding of what it is to be a good citizen in modern Britain. The impact of this work can be seen in all aspects of pupils' behaviour and attitudes. One pupil said: 'We don't allow any language that is sexist, racist or homophobic.'

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that the school has robust and effective policies and procedures for the safety and safeguarding of pupils. Procedures for the appointment of staff are rigorous and appropriate checks are made on the suitability of staff and volunteers to work with children.

Staff are well trained regarding child protection and internet safety. Teachers have, for example, a secure understanding of their statutory duty and are diligent in protecting pupils from the threats from extremism, radicalisation, female genital mutilation and child sexual exploitation. Teachers also fulfil their duty to ensure that pupils do not face any type of discrimination.

Staff work hard with parents and external agencies to ensure that pupils are well cared for. Safeguarding is embedded into the culture of the school. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe in lessons and in assemblies. Consequently, they feel safe

and are happy in the school. They say that the rare incidents of verbal bullying are dealt with quickly and effectively.

Inspection findings

- As a leader you provide a clear direction for improvement for all staff and pupils in the school. You have successfully conveyed your aspirations and priorities for further improvement to all your colleagues in school, and it is clear from their survey responses that they support your vision. You share with your deputy headteacher a high level of commitment and enthusiasm. Together you have put into place systems and procedures to help you secure rapid improvements to provision and pupils' achievement. Governors value your strong leadership and share your vision to develop pupils who are future citizens and who achieve well academically.
- You and your leadership team, at senior and middle level, understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school because of the rigorous evaluation of teaching and scrutiny of pupils' work. You regularly see staff and pupils at work and this supports your evaluation of the school's current effectiveness. Middle leaders have many opportunities to go into lessons to guide and evaluate the work of their colleagues. They have all received recent relevant training and have put it to good use to support teachers to better develop their practice. A good example of this is the work undertaken by the leader for the education of pupils who have a hearing impediment. She regularly supports her colleagues to ensure that these pupils can access learning as well as their peers.
- Governors share your high expectations and regularly challenge the school through sharply focused questions, particularly about finance and performance. This is clearly seen in the minutes of governors' meetings. The expertise of some governors in the fields of education, leadership and finance enables governors to accurately evaluate the school's performance. Governors are regular visitors to the school. They are linked to a subject, to learning support or to safeguarding in the school. Each summer they join the whole staff to set a direction for the new school year.
- You have developed robust assessment systems that allow teachers to track accurately the achievement of pupils against age-related expectations. Your senior and middle leaders use the analysis of regular assessments to hold teachers to account during regular progress meetings. However, this analysis is not always used to plan lessons that challenge and meet the needs of the most able pupils. The school has focused strongly on the assessment of writing in the last school year and leaders have commissioned consultants to help secure accurate assessments. In 2016, teachers assessed writing on the new curriculum criteria to be lower than pupils' achievement in reading and mathematics and below the national average in both key stages, and this is now a key priority for improvement.
- The quality of teaching continues to be good. School leaders triangulate lesson observations with work in pupils' books and pupils' progress to assess the quality of teaching. Teachers plan lessons that engage pupils in their learning and encourage their resilience in tackling difficult concepts in mathematics and in challenging texts in English. Mathematics books from Year 2 to Year 6 have many

good examples of problem-solving and reasoning. In Year 2, pupils can already produce well-structured and punctuated extended pieces of writing. In Year 6 lessons, pupils were studying a challenging text from 'The Diary of Anne Frank'. However, there was evidence that teachers in some classes could do more to challenge the most able pupils through tasks that further extended their learning. Pupils showed me work of which they were proud, and a number identified mathematics work they had struggled with but had mastered. Others were proud of well-structured, well-presented writing. Artwork displayed across the school was of a high standard. There was evidence of work in topic books across a range of subjects, including science, geography, history and RE, but cross-curricular skills could be developed in greater depth.

- Writing seen in Year 6 and Year 5 books was well structured and usually well presented. There was some well-punctuated extended writing in Year 2 and evidence of clear progress in writing as pupils move through the school. Pupils are learning to edit and improve their own work, and spelling is well targeted in books. Leaders have now introduced a range of strategies that will improve sentence variety and the use of a wider vocabulary and a broader range of punctuation.
- Teachers mark pupils' books in mathematics and English according to the school policy. They provide comments and advice to help pupils to improve their work. There is good evidence in these books that pupils respond to these targets and that this improves their learning. Marking in other subjects is less well developed.
- Phonics is well taught across early years and key stage 1. Consequently, the proportion of pupils to achieve the required standard is now above the national average. It is clear, when they read aloud, that pupils are able to decode and encode words well. The more able pupils read fluently and can talk about their personal wider reading. The less able pupils competently split up complex words and reconstruct them to help them to read.
- The school's curriculum is broad and balanced and topics are well chosen to include activities that appeal to all pupils. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school. It permeates the curriculum and assemblies. It is highly evident in work around the school and in the very positive relationships. Pupils understand equality and tolerance of other faiths, cultures and sexual orientation. Year 6 pupils have significant responsibilities across the school and work with younger children to help them read. They are friendly and polite and behave well around schools and in lessons. They are proud of their school and are keen to do well in class. In a small number of lessons, where teaching does not engage pupils some disruptive behaviour results. Leaders are taking appropriate actions to manage this.
- Procedures for tracking and supporting good attendance are strong. Attendance is above the national average overall. Leaders have focused strongly on the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities this year. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils improved in 2015/16. The attendance of some pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, care and health plan has not improved. However, evidence provided by the attendance officer identifies clear reasons for their absence, including ill-health or medical needs.
- Outcomes for children in the early years have risen and are above the national

average. Outcomes, including rates of progress, at key stage 1 and at key stage 2 are at or above national averages in reading, mathematics and for grammar, spelling and punctuation. However, outcomes and progress in writing are below average.

- The key stage 2 outcomes in 2016 showed that not all of the most able pupils attained at a greater depth. However, as seen in your own tracking information, current most-able pupils are making better progress. It is clear from our discussions that the achievement of the most able pupils is a high priority for you and the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most able pupils reach the standards of which they are capable given their starting points
- they continue the focus on raising pupils' achievement in writing, including through opportunities across the curriculum
- they continue the focus on improving the attendance of groups of pupils such as those who are disadvantaged or have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

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

Yours sincerely

Gena Merrett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you, your deputy headteacher, middle leaders, teaching staff and governors. I spoke to the chair of the governing body by telephone. I spoke to pupils in lessons, around the school and in meetings. I visited classrooms to observe pupils learning and look at their work. I looked at the work of pupils from the previous school year. I considered information about pupils' progress and attainment and the school's self-evaluation and action plans. I conducted a full review of safeguarding, including an evaluation of the impact of the school's policies to keep children safe, training, safeguarding checks and record-keeping. I looked at the provision for the hearing impaired and considered information about the attainment and attendance of pupils, particularly those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. I took into account the 44 responses by parents on the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, 11 text responses from parents, 29 returned staff surveys and 34 returned pupil surveys.

In this inspection, the key lines of enquiry were:

- How effective is safeguarding and is it embedded in the school's culture?
- Have 2016 outcomes improved for the early years foundation stage, key stage 1 and for specific groups of pupils at key stage 2?
- In particular, what were the attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities in 2016 across all year groups?
- What is the challenge for more-able pupils in lessons, given that they appear to have underachieved at key stage 2, according to the data?
- What is the quality of writing in all subjects across the curriculum?
- Did the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities improve in 2015/16 and what is it currently?