

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



6 December 2016

Mrs Helen Longton-Howorth
Headteacher
Carden Primary School
County Oak Avenue
Brighton
East Sussex
BN1 8LU

Dear Mrs Longton-Howorth

Short inspection of Carden Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 24 November 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 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since taking up your position in September 2014, you have put in place the changes required to ensure that the school continues to improve. Your priorities are the right ones. Consequently, the foundations required to move the school forward are now firmly in place and the capacity for further improvement is clear to see.

Strong partnerships with the governing body and local authority have been instrumental in bringing about the improvements required. Governors support and challenge you well. They understand the school's strengths and weaknesses and have ensured that their role remains strategic in nature, allowing you the freedom to implement the many changes you have made. The support of the local authority has been more hands-on. Their advice and guidance over the last two years have helped you to introduce the systems and processes required to ensure that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved.

Senior and middle leaders support you well. The impact of the changes you have made to the leadership structure and re-allocation of roles has been beneficial. Leaders clearly understand their individual and collective responsibilities. Because of this, the school is well led and managed and staff enjoy working at Carden.

Classrooms are happy and productive places. Pupils were clearly enjoying learning during my tour of the school and were happy to talk about their work. Members of

one Year 3 class were keen to share their ideas about the use of animal fur for clothing, discussing the benefits this might have brought to stone-age man. The key stage 2 class in the school's specialist speech and language centre worked enthusiastically with their teacher to draft a poem together, quite comfortable with my presence when challenged with the difficult task of reading their finished work aloud.

Pupils in Year 6 worked in groups keenly drafting high-quality newspaper reports, based on information gleaned during the previous day's visit and talk by the daughter of a holocaust survivor. A group of boys in Year 2 were happy to talk to me about their mathematics work, proud to show me that they could easily complete the work they had been set, although this did lead to discussion about the level of challenge seen in a minority of classrooms.

Pupils told me that they feel safe in school. They also told me that most children are kind to each other most of the time, and that serious disagreements are rare. Older pupils explained the school's process of 'peaceful problem-solving', which allows them to take control of their own behaviour and speak out when they disapprove of the actions of others. The school's core values of aspiration, respect, kindness, courage and safety were articulated well during my formal meeting with a group of pupils. Quite unprompted, one girl told me, 'They are like gold to us.' It was clear to me throughout the inspection that these values do indeed underpin the day-to-day life of the school.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors recognised the many strengths of the school, including the high quality of pastoral care, the school's excellent specialist speech and language centre, and positive relationships between parents and staff. They also identified the need to ensure that the quality of teaching improved across all phases of the school, including in the early years classes. Leaders have addressed these matters effectively, so that the quality of teaching and learning in all phases of the school has improved, with most now good or better.

Since the last inspection, school leaders have continued the important process of self-evaluation in order to identify the most important priorities to improve the school. You were able to explain clearly the school's strengths, as well as the areas that need to be developed. These include ensuring that the school's phonics provision continues to improve and that systems to assess children's progress and set next steps in learning in the nursery and reception classes are further refined. We also agreed that teachers need to be more consistent in the levels of challenge they offer to most-able pupils, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's systems and procedures to ensure that children are safe are robust. Governors and staff understand their responsibilities well and are vigilant where the protection and safety of children is concerned. Statutory guidelines are followed regarding policies and the training of staff. Routines at the start and finish of the school day are sound, with parents commenting positively during the inspection

about recent changes to how this is managed. All parents spoken to during the inspection feel that their children are safe at school. Children are taught about the potential dangers when they use the internet or social media and told me that they feel safe in school.

Inspection findings

- You lead the school very well and have a good understanding of the changes required to improve the school. Under your leadership, declining standards in key stage 2 have been quickly reversed and firm foundations established for further improvement.
- Changes in the structure of the school's leadership team have been well thought through. Distributed leadership has created capacity for senior leaders to focus on those key aspects of the school that still need to improve. Middle leaders are very motivated and keen to play their part in moving the school forward.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and honest, and leads to effective development planning. Crucially, you have clearly prioritised aspects that need to be better, focusing on addressing the most important first.
- Systems to monitor the progress and attainment of pupils are sound. This means that school leaders have a clear understanding of the progress pupils are making, particularly pupils from vulnerable groups.
- The quality of teaching and learning continues to improve. School leaders have developed good systems to monitor the quality of teaching, which shows marked improvement over the last two years, leading to better outcomes for pupils.
- Most children in the early years make good progress from their different starting points. Last year, all made the progress expected of them. However, school leaders know that more need to make the accelerated progress required for outcomes at the end of the Reception Year to more closely match those seen in other schools nationally.
- The vast majority of pupils make at least good progress in reading, writing and mathematics as they move through the school. This is especially the case in key stage 2, where 2016 provisional test and assessment results indicate that progress and attainment measures compare favourably to those seen in other schools nationally.
- Most pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds do well. Provisional test and assessment results in 2016 show that most made better progress than other pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion achieving at expected levels was close to, or matched, those of other schools nationally.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do very well due to the good quality of provision they receive. This includes pupils who attend the school's specialist speech and language centre, who also integrate into mainstream classes as and when appropriate, according to their individual needs.
- Outcomes for most-able pupils, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are stronger in writing than in reading and mathematics. During the inspection, it was clear to see that there are sometimes inconsistencies in the level of challenge offered by teachers to most-able pupils, within subjects and across year groups. You have already made this a priority for improvement.
- School leaders have identified the school's phonics provision as an area to

develop. The proportion of pupils at the expected standard by the end of Year 2 matches that seen in other schools nationally. However, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in Year 1 is not as high as leaders require.

- Despite the school's phonics provision being a priority for improvement, those pupils who find reading difficult were able to use their phonics skills well when they read to the inspector. Most-able readers relished the opportunity to show off their reading skills and were happy to share their opinions about what constitutes a good book.
- During the inspection, pupils' behaviour in classrooms was very good. Older pupils explained this was quite normal, because 'that's what teachers expect'.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- systems to assess progress and plan next steps in learning for children in the early years is improved, so more children make accelerated progress
- a more consistent approach to the teaching of phonics is developed, including providing pupils with more opportunities to practice their phonics skills across the wider curriculum
- the level of challenge offered to most-able pupils, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, is consistently high across the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Clive Close

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Throughout the inspection, I focused on the safety and behaviour of pupils, as well as the quality of the early years provision, phonics and the progress of most-able and disadvantaged pupils. I met with you and your deputy headteacher, middle leaders, the chair of governors, accompanied by four other governors, parents, pupils and a representative of the local authority. You accompanied me on visits to classrooms, during which I talked to pupils and assessed the quality of their work. I also listened to a number of pupils read. I talked to parents at the beginning of the school day, considered 70 'free-text' responses and took into account 74 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. One parent wrote to me to express her views of the school. Staff responses to the online staff questionnaire were also considered. I scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, policies, minutes of meetings and pupil progress information.