

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)



9 January 2017

Mr James Tibbles  
Headteacher  
Phoenix Community Primary School  
Belmont Road  
Kennington  
Ashford  
Kent  
TN24 9LS

Dear Mr Tibbles

### **Short inspection of Phoenix Community Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 13 December 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 July 2012.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You know the school very well and are determined to move things forward. Your working partnership with the newly appointed deputy headteacher is positive. The capacity for school leaders to improve the school further is clear to see.

Governance is a developing strength, following a period when the governing body made too little impact. New governors know the school increasingly well. Many have expertise and experience, in finance or school leadership for instance, which enables them to have greater impact on ensuring that the school is run efficiently.

Classrooms are busy places. It is clear that pupils enjoy coming to school. Their attitudes to learning are strong. They told me that learning is fun because their teachers are 'great'. They were particularly positive about the extra-curricular opportunities they experience, including sport and arts-based clubs. Music has a high profile in the school. Pupils were enthusiastic when telling me about their experiences of performing in public through the national Young Voices initiative.

Our visits to Reception Year showed that children enjoy learning when there is a clear purpose. For example, on the day of the inspection, they were learning about Christmas. Staff promoted the correct use of language as children shared ideas about repairing Santa's sleigh. Other children concentrated on writing Christmas

lists, using their emerging phonics skills to form strings of letters into words. Eventually, we were enthusiastically informed that the preferred tool to fix the sleigh would be a prop from the nativity play, a highly appropriate 'magical' golden sword.

Visits to other year groups gave me good insight into the different aspects you are trying to improve. It is clear that levels of challenge are still not consistently high enough in some year groups. This means that most-able pupils, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are not making as much progress as they might. However, it was pleasing to witness some of the other strengths in the school's provision, especially the good relationships between teachers and pupils, resulting in pupils having very good attitudes to learning.

During my formal discussion with a representative group of pupils, their great sense of pride in the school became very evident. One boy told me that he felt the school was 'unique', elaborating fully on why he felt this was the case, including that he felt very strongly that staff were 'imaginative' in their approach to teaching.

Throughout the day, you were able to share some of your long-term aspirations for the school, including future changes to the way the curriculum is delivered. We agreed that care should be taken to ensure that breadth and balance are maintained, and that the key priority of improving standards in reading by offering better planned and more challenging experiences should not be compromised.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors highlighted the many strengths of the school, including the good progress pupils make from starting points that are often below or well below those seen nationally. They also identified the need for continued improvement in the quality of teaching, and for the standard of boys' writing to be better. Leaders dealt with these matters successfully. Effective teaching is ensuring that most pupils are making good or better progress in most subjects across the school. Provisional test and assessment results for the end of key stage 2 in 2016 show that boys made at least good progress in writing. This was also the case in key stage 1, where boys attained in line with national averages, indicating good progress from low starting points.

Since the last inspection, school leaders have continued the important process of self-evaluation in order to identify the key priorities to improve the school. You were able to explain clearly the school's many strengths, as well as the areas that need to be developed. These include ensuring that levels of challenge provided for most-able pupils are consistently high in all classes, and that pupils make better progress in reading. We also discussed my concerns that while leaders' self-evaluation appears sound, improvement planning could be sharper so it is clearer what will be done and how the impact on learning will be checked.

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

Arrangements to safeguard children are fit for purpose. Policies, procedures and systems are robust and day-to-day routines are sound. Pre-employment checks to ensure the suitability of staff are fully in place. Staff and governors have attended appropriate training and received additional support and advice from specialists from the local authority when appropriate.

The school's culture to ensure that pupils are safe is well developed. Staff, including non-teaching support staff, were able to explain fully why they feel children are safe at school. All parents who spoke to me or completed the online questionnaire, Parent View, feel that their children are safe at school. Pupils told me that they feel safe and are confident that staff know how to look after them, including when they go on trips or educational visits outside school.

## **Inspection findings**

- You lead the school well and have the confidence of parents, staff and governors alike. Leaders' aspirations are high. Partnerships between school leaders, governors and the local authority are strong.
- Self-evaluation is honest and accurate. The priorities for improvement are the right ones, although more clarity in improvement planning is required. This will ensure that leaders and governors waste no time in doing the right things to move the school forward.
- The school's curriculum meets the needs of its pupils well, although leaders have plans to develop and improve the way it is delivered. You understand fully that care needs to be taken to ensure that these changes do not detract from the current priority of improving the school's outcomes in reading.
- The proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of their Reception Year is consistently lower than that seen nationally. However, the vast majority of children make good or better progress from their different starting points because of the quality of early years provision.
- The teaching of phonics is a strength. Although pupils used their phonics skills well when I listened to them read, staff should take more care when allocating books to engage, stretch and challenge both low- and higher ability readers.
- Our discussions and analysis of plans to improve the school confirmed that outcomes in reading need to improve. This is particularly the case in key stage 2, where pupils are not making as much progress as they should. You have already made this a priority for improvement.
- Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds do well overall. Leaders and governors monitor the progress of this vulnerable group well. They know where provision could be better and are taking action to reduce some variations in outcomes between different subjects and year groups.

- You have identified that outcomes for most-able pupils, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, could be better. In both key stages 1 and 2, too few pupils achieve above expected standards, especially in mathematics. This has already been identified by the school and made a priority for improvement.
- The governing body is increasingly effective at holding leaders to account for improving the school. Governors are dedicated and care passionately about the school's ongoing success. Their commitment and energy have ensured that the school is well set for further improvement.
- The local authority has supported you well since you took up your position. The advice and guidance of its improvement adviser have been key in improving provision. This support is set to continue, but at a lower level due to the growing strength in leadership of the school.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the level of challenge offered to most-able pupils, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, increases and becomes more consistent across the school, especially in mathematics
- pupils make more progress in reading, particularly as they move through key stage 2, so that outcomes improve rapidly to match more closely those seen in writing
- improvement planning is sharpened, to give more clarity about the key actions required to improve the school, so their impact can be more accurately measured.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Kent. 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 progress pupils make in reading, the quality of provision in Reception and the progress of most-able and disadvantaged pupils. I met with you and your deputy, the chair of the governing body accompanied by four other governors, pupils, support staff, and parents. I also met with 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 pupils read. I observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms and around the school. I talked to parents at the beginning of the school day and took into account 26 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as 10 free-text responses. I scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, policies, minutes of meetings, records of visits to the school by the local authority, and pupil progress information.