

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

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



31 January 2017

Ms Verity Stobart  
Headteacher  
Germander Park School  
1 Germander Place  
Conniburrow  
Milton Keynes  
Buckinghamshire  
MK14 7DU

Dear Ms Stobart

### **Short inspection of Germander Park School**

Following my visit to the school on 12 January 2017, 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 March 2013.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Although in the period between the last inspection and this one pupils' outcomes dropped for a while, they are now recovering. In particular, in 2015, pupils' outcomes were below average in key stage 1 assessments. Pupils are now achieving more highly because of the deep, necessary and substantial changes you have made since joining the school two years ago, as a consequence of which, pupils' outcomes in 2016 were better than in 2015. However, you have high expectations and acknowledge that, despite improvements, 2016 published performance data was not as strong as you would have liked. In part, this is due to pupils joining and leaving the school after Reception and before the end of Year 2. You are sensibly focusing on improving writing, which was weaker than mathematics and reading in 2016 national assessments. Of note is the strong progress that pupils currently make, which you and your leaders convincingly evidenced during this inspection.

You and your leaders are driven by a very strong sense of moral purpose. Staff ensure that the school's inclusive ethos is put into practice. You rightly identify that a significant number of pupils have substantial barriers to learning, including joining the school with very little or no understanding of English. However, you and your staff are totally dedicated to providing what is needed for pupils to overcome any barriers and succeed. Pupils spoke of their pride in the school and how they 'love it when others follow the school's values'. The atmosphere in school is purposeful but

also full of life and joy. You are not complacent and constantly review the impact of all the assistance you provide. This assistance is multifaceted and involves effective partnerships with external providers and local schools, as well as training for parents. In particular, you have worked closely with parents to improve attendance, wisely using governors to reinforce messages about the importance of good attendance.

Your staff carry out accurate baselines assessments when children join the school in Reception and at any point thereafter, as necessary. You have identified that children currently in Reception are developmentally below what might be expected. In order to help them catch up, early years staff miss no opportunity to enhance children's communications skills. For instance, as children were mixing dough for cooking, they were being asked to retell different parts of the story they are currently learning. In addition, a significant minority of Reception children are significantly behind in terms of developmental expectations for their age. You have responded to this challenge systematically and constructively, seeking expert guidance, including from the local authority. You have acted upon it well. Consequently, you have established a 'nurture' group in early years. This group receives thoughtfully planned care, support and stimulation. Your approach to helping children in the 'nurture' group is indicative of your leadership style: thorough, determined and collaborative.

Following the removal of national curriculum levels, you have introduced a new system for assessing and tracking pupils' progress, which you have recently refined. Your accurate assessments show that current pupils are making stronger progress than pupils have done previously. Of note is the impact of carefully planned opportunities for pupils to learn how to be skilful readers and writers. Reading and writing developments have been led very effectively by the consultant literacy teacher, who works part time at the school. Her expertise has supported leaders in making sure that their checks on pupils' work and the quality of teaching are well focused. Consequently, there is a high degree of consistency in the way that phonics is taught across the school. Pupils are able to apply their phonic knowledge when reading to each other in small groups. Current pupils' writing in Year 2 is of a much higher standard than that of Year 2 pupils at the same time last year. The rise in standards is as a result of the effective way this year group was taught when they were in Year 1. In response, you have reviewed the planned learning for Year 2 and made it more challenging. However, you agree that some teachers need to develop their questioning skills further so that they probe more deeply to check on pupils' understanding.

The governing body values the dedication and commitment of leaders and staff. The chair and other governors have educational expertise which they use well when questioning you about the impact of initiatives. They recognise that some pupils face incredible challenges, but, like you, they have high expectations of how well they achieve. Governors question you closely on how successfully pupils meet these expectations.

The school is moving forward. Those areas for development in the previous

inspection report have been successfully tackled. You have resolutely made changes that are transformative rather than quick fixes. Most-able pupils are being challenged more effectively in mathematics and, in 2016, the proportion reaching above age-related expectations was close to average. Teaching is increasingly consistently strong.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Keeping children safe is given pole position in your priorities. Much of your work has focused on engaging parents more fully than previously. Of note is the way you have trained parents and guardians about how to interact positively with their youngsters, including through playing together. Where necessary, you have reminded parents how to reinforce boundaries in an appropriate manner. Every pupil is known to you, so you are able to place any concerns raised within the context of your in-depth knowledge of pupils' experiences. Some pupils have experienced extremely challenging situations, including living in temporary housing. The support and care you provide for these children means that the school is their safe haven. Where you have concerns, you make good use of contacts at the local authority to get expert advice about the best ways to follow them up.

You are scrupulous in ensuring that safeguarding procedures and records are detailed and effective. Your insistence that nothing slips through the net means that you have a highly effective electronic system for recording the training all staff have received. Given the complex needs of your pupils, you wisely insist that teachers undertake online safeguarding training before taking up appointments. You also use expertise gained from your local authority work as a safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty trainer to pose challenging questions about safeguarding at the start of most staff meetings. These questions remind staff of their roles in keeping children safe as well as any issues that are particularly relevant.

### **Inspection findings**

- The inspection focused on the key lines of enquiry agreed at our first meeting. These included the impact of leadership and governance, the accuracy of assessments, including baseline testing in early years, the work you are doing to improve reading and writing, and the impact of the curriculum on different groups. In addition, one key line of enquiry was focused on the support and additional help you provide for pupils and their families, and included attendance. I also considered the impact of the school's work to keep children safe.
- The approach to assessment adopted by the school enables leaders and teachers to identify pupils who need to make rapid progress to reach age-related expectations. In order to secure this progress pupils receive highly monitored effective additional support.
- Teachers' assessments indicate that a much greater percentage will reach age-related expectations in 2017 than in 2016. You have standardised these assessments within school and with local partner schools.
- Governors rigorously monitor the impact of additional funds for disadvantaged pupils. In 2016 key stage 1 assessments, disadvantaged pupils performed better

than other pupils in school. There was a small difference between the achievement of the most-able disadvantaged pupils in school and others nationally.

- Pupils have been well schooled in how to ensure that their writing hangs together well. They are intensively exposed to different modes of writing. These models provide a solid groundwork from which pupils are developing their ability to use grammar and punctuation correctly and to create specific effects on the reader.
- Due to improvements in teaching phonics, the proportion reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 check improved greatly in 2016, although remaining below average because a number of pupils had special educational needs and/or disabilities. The proportion reaching the expected standard is set to rise further in 2017.
- The school is growing in strength from early years upwards. The development of pupils' literacy skills in Reception is effective and feeds into the work you are doing to develop pupils' confidence in writing. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development was well above average in 2016, despite children starting with levels of development that were lower than might be expected.
- You have rapidly and successfully developed teachers and leaders, all of whom joined the school after you were appointed. You and your leaders agree that further work needs to be done to sharpen the way that teachers and assistants use questioning to enhance pupils' learning.
- You have relentlessly focused on developing the communication skills of your pupils through the curriculum, including through topic work. A highlight was the work you did to celebrate the birth of Shakespeare, which included transforming your hall into a magical forest so that pupils could enter the world of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. This emphasis has helped all pupils, especially those in the early stages of learning English.
- Pupils commented during the inspection on how much they relished the opportunities for learning that the school provides. They understand they have a key role in disseminating the school's positive learning ethos. You rightly evaluate that pupils' behaviour is a strength of the school.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers and assistants further develop their questioning skills so that questions asked are effective in supporting pupils' deep learning.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Milton Keynes. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

I initially met with you and your senior leaders and, then later, we met again to discuss safeguarding. I also met twice with subject leaders. On both occasions the literacy lead consultant teacher was involved. During the second meeting, I observed subject leaders conducting a scrutiny of pupils' work, including work from pupils who have now left. I also met with the chair of the governing body and two other governors. I met separately with a representative from the local authority, and a group of pupils. I spoke informally with parents after school. Short visits were made to a number of lessons, including phonics, to observe teaching and look at work in pupils' books. On most occasions, visits were accompanied by leaders. I observed pupils' behaviour in a range of situations, including in lessons and around school. The 12 responses parents made in response to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the six comments made via free text were considered. I also considered the eight responses to the staff questionnaire. I analysed a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, the latest improvement plan, information about pupils' progress and safeguarding documentation.