

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Caroline Cain
Headteacher
New Ash Green Primary School
North Square
New Ash Green
Longfield
Kent
DA3 8JT

Dear Mrs Cain

Short inspection of New Ash Green Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 23 February 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 November 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 are highly ambitious for every pupil in your school, especially those who are vulnerable or face additional challenges. You have taken bold steps to provide high-quality support for the increasing number of vulnerable pupils while at the same time improving the standard of teaching in the school. You and your leaders are very committed to ensuring that every pupil receives the best education possible. Leaders ensure that the school environment is a vibrant and exciting place to learn for all. Staff, parents and pupils are unanimous in their view that the school is a special place where, 'together everyone achieves more'.

The school is also a calm and nurturing place where pupils work well together. They are confident and active citizens who act as excellent advocates for the school. Children in the early years and key stage 1 do especially well. They arrive in the school with lower than average starting points and achieve at or above the national average by the end of key stage 1. Pupils in key stage 2 make good progress from their different starting points in mathematics and attain well. Leaders have very effective systems in place to share ideas and strategies to improve teaching. Staff are unanimous that the school has improved since the previous inspection. Those new to the profession, or new to role, receive good support and guidance. There are also strong links with local schools, especially the local teaching school, and staff take up the many opportunities for further training and development.

Leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of the school well. They have taken the right steps to address the issues raised in the previous inspection. Teachers now plan more effectively for the different needs of pupils in each class. There are good systems in place to ensure that pupils are well supported in their learning. The school's assessment system is used consistently by teachers across the school. As a result, pupils learn from their mistakes and receive constructive guidance about how to improve their work. However, leaders recognise that there is more work to do to ensure that more of the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged, exceed the expected standards in reading and writing at the end of key stage 2. Leaders and governors are also aware that pupils in Years 5 and 6 do not make as much progress as they might in their reading.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Leaders ensure that the designated safeguarding leads are appropriately trained and that all staff receive regular updates on key issues. Governors keep a close eye on this aspect of leaders' work through regular monitoring visits. Leaders are quick to make good use of local agencies to ensure that children and their families receive the best advice, care and guidance. Consequently, pupils feel very well supported. Many parents commented that leaders, 'go the extra mile' and, 'above and beyond' to ensure that their children are safe and well cared for.

Inspection findings

- The inspection considered the progress of disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged, in comparison with that of other pupils with similar starting points. Leaders have put in place a range of effective approaches to support disadvantaged pupils. The help that these pupils receive is closely targeted at their needs, including support before and after school. As a result, these pupils are doing increasingly well and in many cases making as much progress as their peers. Those pupils who need extra help to reach the expected standards in the phonics check receive high-quality guidance and support. As a result, current information shows that these pupils are on track to catch up by the end of Year 2. The vast majority of disadvantaged pupils in key stage 2 are also reaching the expected standards. Governors regularly review the impact of this provision for all disadvantaged pupils by analysing their progress. Consequently, leaders are quick to improve or refine those strategies that work less well. However, both leaders and governors recognise that a smaller than expected proportion of the most able disadvantaged pupils exceed the expected standard. They see this as an area for further development.

- The achievement and attainment of the most able pupils, especially in writing, were also explored. Leaders have adopted a whole-school approach to improving writing that includes developing pupils' language. Pupils, particularly those in key stage 2, are increasingly using more sophisticated vocabulary in their written work such as 'gargantuan' or 'eclectic'. Leaders have made good use of additional training time to coach staff across the school in techniques that will stretch the most able writers. Teachers, especially in key stage 1 and lower key stage 2, are planning challenging lessons. As a result, the most able pupils are increasingly writing at greater depth. When questioned, pupils talked about why they like school, with one pupil commenting how much he enjoyed 'being challenged'. Leaders have also improved the quality of texts used by pupils as well as investing in a new approach to reading. However, there is not yet evidence of the impact of these new strategies on the progress of pupils in Years 5 and 6, where achievement in the past was less strong. Leaders recognise that this remains a key focus for their ongoing work.
- During the inspection, I considered the quality and impact of the support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This is a significant strength of the school. Leaders, especially the special educational needs coordinator, have an excellent understanding of the range of needs of these pupils, who are joining the school with increasingly complex issues. There is an extensive range of support strategies in place, including help to catch up in literacy and mathematics. Leaders have invested wisely in additional services to provide support for pupils who have social and emotional health needs. Leaders have also developed strong partnerships with the local special school and University College London to keep up to date with the latest developments. For example, teachers are making good use of new research on 'neurodiversity' to assess first and plan for the needs of pupils in their classes. As a result, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities attend school more frequently than previously, and are making more rapid progress from their different starting points.
- The inspection also investigated the quality of teaching of phonics and reading, especially in early years and key stage 1. Children in early years do well. Teachers skilfully plan opportunities for children to acquire new skills across the key areas of learning. Leaders have invested in improving the outside environment as well as updating the classrooms. Children make good progress from their starting points. The most able children are well supported to grasp more complex sounds such as 'ck' and some children are confident early writers. In Year 1, the teaching of phonics is especially effective. In 2016, the vast majority of pupils met the expected standards. Leaders have recognised the strengths of teaching in key stage 1 and have ensured that the most successful practice is shared across the school. However, the impact of these changes is not yet evident, especially on the progress of pupils in upper key stage 2.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers use the most effective approaches to improve pupils' reading so that more pupils achieve age-related expectations at the end of key stage 2
- an increasing proportion of pupils, especially the most able disadvantaged, exceed the expected standards in writing.

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

Yours sincerely

Seamus Murphy
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I visited the school for one day. I met with you, your leaders, staff and governors as well as speaking with a representative of the local authority. Policies around safeguarding, your own evaluation of the school's work and other documents were scrutinised. I visited all year groups to see teaching and learning. I also looked at pupils' work in lessons with leaders, as well as a selection of disadvantaged pupils' writing books from Years 3, 5 and 6. There were informal meetings with pupils. The 78 responses to Parent View, the 38 responses from staff and the 118 responses from pupils to the online Ofsted survey were also analysed. I also took into account the views of parents whom I spoke to informally at the end of the school day.