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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Ann De'Ath
Headteacher
Howard Infant and Nursery School
Parkway
Gaywood
King's Lynn
Norfolk
PE30 4QJ

Dear Mrs De'Ath

Short inspection of Howard Infant and Nursery School, King's Lynn

Following my visit to the school on 21 March 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 June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You are a highly respected, dedicated and knowledgeable leader, and the deputy headteacher and senior team leader provide strong support. Together you have built a skilled and committed staff team who work effectively alongside each other and do all that they can to support and look after the pupils in their care.

You, the staff and governors, are driven by a very strong sense of moral purpose and you ensure that the school's inclusive ethos is put into practice. Pupils thrive within a very positive and nurturing environment, they develop good attitudes that prepare them well for life in modern Britain. Pupils are taught that all people are equally valuable and that they should not judge others on, for example, the colour of their skin or their religion. As explained by a pupil: 'We are good friends with everybody. We are kind and everybody is welcome here, every single person.'

You rightly identify that a significant proportion of pupils have substantial barriers to learning, including pupils who join the school with very little or no understanding of English, and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff are totally dedicated to providing what is needed for all pupils to overcome any barriers and, consequently, succeed. The core values are summarised in the school's statement, 'Reach for the stars, to be safe, succeed and shine.' This is clearly understood by pupils who told me, 'this school helps you find what you're good at',

and 'teaches you that you can do anything if you try'. Consequently, pupils achieve well and are prepared for the next stage of their education. Parents recognise the good work you do to ensure that their children are taught well and make good progress. One parent summarised the responses saying: 'My son really enjoys going to this school and all the teachers have had a positive impact towards his learning.'

Since the previous inspection, you have taken effective action to ensure that the school continues to improve. You and the governors have focused strongly on improving the quality of teaching. Inspection evidence shows that pupils are progressing well in reading, writing and mathematics as a result of thorough planning, good subject knowledge and effective teaching. Teaching assistants are deployed very well, and use their considerable skills effectively to support pupils and encourage them to work independently.

Pupils enjoy learning, work with sustained concentration, and welcome the frequent and specific feedback from teachers. They act promptly on the guidance they receive and actively improve their work. The quality and quantity of work in pupils' books, displays around the school, and the school's assessment information indicate that the quality of teaching is effective over time.

This is an improving school, and leaders and governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Improvement planning, however, is not yet fully developed to enable leaders and governors to monitor pupils' progress as effectively as they could. Targets are not always clear. Plans lack measurable success criteria and clear milestones that mark out the necessary steps to achieve longer-term goals.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and the governors have made sure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed, clear and up to date.

Safeguarding records are of high quality. Robust systems are in place for the recruitment and induction of new staff. You have established strong systems that enable staff to raise concerns and share important information to help keep pupils safe. Referrals to external agencies are made quickly and efficiently. Governors regularly check to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are robust and that everyone understands them. Pupils say that they feel well cared for and looked after in school, and parents agree.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain whether the school remains good, one of the key lines of enquiry I explored was whether teaching and learning in the early years are effective, and how leaders are ensuring that children make at least good progress from their starting points. My focus on early years was because published data shows that in 2016 the proportion of children who achieved the expected level for children of their age was below the national average. The published information also shows

a year-on-year improvement from low results in 2014.

- You have responded quickly to improve outcomes in the early years, which is a priority in your improvement plans. Leaders set challenging targets for what children can achieve by the time they leave Reception and ensure that children make the best use of learning time to improve and develop their skills. Teachers show the children how they can use the resources and activities productively, which inspires the children to be creative and to challenge themselves. Staff intervene with appropriate questions and prompts and children are keen to evaluate their work and make improvements. There are increased opportunities for children to develop their skills across all areas of learning indoors and outside.
- From looking at the work produced in the children's current learning journeys, it is clearly evident that the children in the Nursery and Reception classes make at least good progress from, typically, low starting points. School assessment information demonstrates that the proportion of children on track to achieve the early learning goals is now much closer to the national average.
- Published data shows that in 2016, the proportion of girls achieving the early learning goals at the end of early years was much greater than that of the boys. The achievement gap between the boys and the girls has been addressed by developing the curriculum to include activities that appeal to boys' interests.
- Boys' enjoyment of learning has been promoted well. I observed a group of boys who were very engaged lining up their bikes to make a 'car wash'. Watering cans were used to 'fill the bikes up with petrol' and the boys discussed how 'you always need to pay for petrol, so that will cost you £3!' As a result of a stimulating environment and targeted support to develop their language skills, more boys are making rapid progress and their achievement is now closer to that of the girls.
- Another area that I focused upon was how effectively phonics is taught, and if pupils make good enough progress from their starting points. The proportion of pupils that reached the expected level in the Year 1 phonics check was below the national average in 2016, alongside an improvement from the school's lower results over time.
- Effective action has tackled the previous weaknesses in phonics teaching. You have put well-planned, targeted support in place. In the Reception classes, staff were observed providing many opportunities for children to practise and develop their knowledge of phonics. Children were excitedly finding and identifying sound cards in a tray of rice, and jumping on and reading words written on large pieces of paper. Outside, a group of children were clearly enjoying playing bingo by finding letters and words hidden in the outdoor area to match with those on their bingo cards.
- Pupils in Year 1 use their knowledge of phonics effectively to help them to work out unfamiliar words. They blend sounds together confidently to read words, and separate the sounds in words in order to spell. A typical example of what pupils can do was seen when a pupil in Year 1, having made the word 'oink', proudly said, 'look, if I cover up the "o" then I have made "ink"!'. The school's current assessment information indicates that children's attainment in phonics will be

improved and much closer to the national average in 2017.

- You keep parents well informed about the approach to teaching phonics through practical workshops and the wealth of information on the school's website, which helps parents to support their children's learning at home.
- I investigated how leaders are ensuring that the needs of the most able pupils are being met, so that they make rapid progress and attain well. Published data for 2016 shows that the proportion of Year 2 pupils attaining greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics was below the national average.
- During the inspection, I looked at pupils' workbooks, which demonstrate that on some occasions the most able pupils are being effectively challenged, for example, to solve a range of mathematical problems. I observed a group in Year 2 working enthusiastically to find the difference between two-digit numbers. Another group spoke enthusiastically about how they have progressed in their learning, explaining that their teachers give them plenty of opportunities to write letters, recipes, instructions and stories. They also told me, however, that sometimes they find their work too easy and they would like 'more challenges', to make them 'really think' and 'want trickier work and less time to do it!'
- Inspection evidence verifies that the most able pupils are now making stronger progress in reading, writing and mathematics. The work you are undertaking reflects your acknowledgement that while most-able pupils are making better progress, they are not given work that challenges them sufficiently in all classes, and in all subjects.
- Finally, I considered how well pupils are supported and encouraged to attend well. This line of enquiry arose from historical information showing that some pupils had particularly high rates of absence, including persistent absence. High absence rates are no longer the case.
- You ensure that attendance is given a high priority. The importance of pupils' regular attendance is communicated clearly to parents at induction meetings and through information on the school's website. You work closely with families where attendance is a concern, wisely using governors to reinforce messages about the importance of good attendance through, for example, attendance panel meetings. Pupils' good attendance is celebrated through class awards and individual rewards, which are very popular. Current information shows an improvement in the attendance of all groups of pupils and the overall rate of attendance is moving closer to the national average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- school improvement planning includes clear targets, milestones and success criteria so that leaders have a precise, rigorous measure to secure rapid improvement
- the most able pupils are consistently challenged across all subjects, so that they always achieve the best they can.

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

Yours sincerely

Fiona Webb
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- I gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, including observations of teaching and learning, jointly with you, in all classes, and sampling of pupils' current work across all subjects and across a wide range of abilities.
- I scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including your self-evaluation, the school's plans for improvement and assessment information for all year groups.
- I spoke informally to pupils in classrooms and met formally with two groups of pupils.
- Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined, including mandatory checks made during the recruitment of new staff, and case studies about referrals made to external agencies. A discussion was held with you as the school's designated safeguarding lead.
- I met with the chair of the governing body and two other governors.
- I spoke to a local authority officer on the telephone.
- I took into account the 13 parent responses on the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, the seven responses parents made using the free-text service, the results provided by 17 staff in the staff questionnaire, and the four responses pupils made using the pupil questionnaire.