

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



12 April 2017

Ms Maggie Clifford
Headteacher
The Grove Junior School
Dark Lane
Harpenden
Hertfordshire
AL5 1QB

Dear Ms Clifford

Short inspection of The Grove Junior School

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 your 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. You direct the continual improvement of the school with clarity, determination and unerring care for every pupil. These qualities are shared across your capable senior team and governors. You, along with governors, have created a strong ethos where the values of 'Creativity, Inclusion and Aspiration' underpin all aspects of school life. Staff are united around these values and offer a happy, encouraging environment in which children feel safe, are taught well and enjoy their education. As a result, pupils across all year groups are making good progress and show exemplary attitudes towards working hard and learning.

In my meetings with them and my visits to lessons, pupils were very positive about their school and showed exceptional kindness and respect for one another. They enjoy very positive relationships with staff and value the teaching they now receive. Pupils of all backgrounds and abilities agree that work and teaching activities have become more challenging, and that they are receiving the help they need to do their best. Pupils also appreciate the wide range of enrichment activities provided for them.

All parents who spoke with me and the vast majority who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, were extremely positive about the school and said they would recommend it to others. They commend the school highly for the quality of pupils' learning, teaching and their personal development. They talked

enthusiastically about the support the leadership team offers to help them support their children to learn at home, particularly with reading, writing and mathematics.

Pupils join the school with standards in reading, writing and mathematics which are higher than those expected for their age. At the end of key stage 2, standards remain well above the national average and in 2016, pupils' attainment was significantly higher than the national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. However, in your accurate self-evaluation you recognise that the progress made by a small number of pupils was not as secure in writing and mathematics as it was in reading. These pupils included those deemed to be disadvantaged, some who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and some with average and higher starting points. You and your governors appreciate that to be outstanding, further work needs to be done to ensure that these groups of pupils achieve consistently well.

Your leaders and staff have wasted no time in successfully addressing these priorities via significant improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. In addition, all staff work supportively with parents to remove any barriers to learning, particularly for those whose children are deemed to be disadvantaged or who have special needs and/or disabilities. As a result of this effective work, previous differences between the progress of different groups of pupils have been quickly reduced.

You have accurately assessed the progress made towards the areas for improvement found at the last inspection. One area was the improvement of teachers' questioning skills, which are now a significant strength of teaching across the school. In response to the other area for improvement, you have ensured that pupils of all abilities, including the most able, are now provided with work and activities which are suitably challenging, and as a result they have the opportunity to develop a more secure and deeper understanding in most subjects.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors, ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are effective and that there is a culture of vigilance. All statutory requirements are fully met, including effective pre-employment checks to ensure the suitability of staff appointments. Staff are appropriately trained in ensuring that pupils are kept safe. As a result, they have a thorough understanding of safeguarding procedures and know what to do should they have any concerns about pupils. The school involves appropriate agencies where necessary to facilitate timely and effective support for vulnerable pupils and their families. Record-keeping is meticulous and leaders make effective use of information to act quickly if pupils' circumstances change.

You and your staff have created an environment in which pupils feel very safe. They understand the different types of bullying that can occur, although they believe incidents within school are very rare. They are also very confident they will be helped if they report any concern within school because of the approachability of staff. The school carefully assesses their use of the internet and advises them on

the safe use of age appropriate communication technology, including social media and games. Leaders make thorough checks to review the difference this guidance makes and regularly inform parents on any developments. As a result, pupils are highly aware of how to keep themselves safe when they are working or playing on line. Pupils are also aware of the importance of attending school, which is reflected in the above-average attendance of all groups. Persistent absence rates are below the national average. Parents commend the school for keeping their children safe.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and teachers ensure that pupils in all year groups make good progress and differences between the achievement of different groups are quickly reducing, particularly in writing and mathematics. Scrutiny of pupils' work, observations of their learning in lessons and the school's accurate assessment information confirm your evaluations and the effectiveness of improvement work. The proportions of pupils on track to reach higher than expected standards in both writing and mathematics have risen significantly and are now as high as in reading. These findings apply equally to pupils with higher and average starting points, and include within these groups, disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Following the 2016 key stage 2 results for writing and mathematics, leaders acted quickly to improve curriculum planning for both subjects. You have secured high-quality teaching, learning and assessment in all year groups. We agreed that effective training and new approaches have raised the level of challenge and consistency of teaching in mathematics and writing across the school. Teachers confidently demonstrate secure subject knowledge and plan work which is now more precisely matched to pupils of different abilities.
- In writing, subject leaders and teachers have provided many opportunities for pupils to develop their written skills, vocabulary, grammar, punctuation and spelling. Pupils are routinely taught to use higher-level vocabulary and apply it accurately. As a result of these improvements, pupils of different ages and abilities write convincingly and purposefully. A particular strength in teachers' use of questioning is the way it helps pupils to skilfully use their knowledge of writing. A key result is their ability to plan different pieces of writing by using appropriate structures and language, which have the desired effect on the reader. The effective teaching of editing skills also helps them complete their work to a high standard. While the teaching of writing is now good, we agreed that the progress of some lower-attaining pupils slows when they do not receive the precise support needed to help them recall and use their knowledge effectively.
- Leaders have successfully improved the quality of pupils' learning in mathematics. The teaching of number rules, tables, operations and calculation is very secure. Teachers have also introduced a wide range of practical mathematical equipment and carefully plan work and activities which help pupils to rigorously apply their knowledge to more complex problems and higher-level calculations. Teachers use questioning and discussions very skilfully in these lessons. As a result of these approaches and across the different year groups,

pupils' reasoning skills have improved significantly and they confidently articulate their knowledge when explaining the thinking behind their answers. While the teaching of mathematics is good, we agreed that in some instances, teachers do not check that all pupils properly understand their tasks as they move onto more challenging work and this can slow down their progress in lessons.

- Leaders' arrangements for setting pupils' targets reflect the high expectation that they should not make less than good progress from their different starting points. The regular tracking and analysis of pupils' progress that leaders undertake is systematic and teachers act on the findings quickly, in order to adjust teaching and support any pupils who are at risk of not making the progress expected of them.
- The number of pupils deemed to be disadvantaged is smaller than average but their progress impacts significantly on overall headline figures of how well pupils achieve. These pupils are assessed accurately and the teaching they receive is effective and precise. Leaders and staff have also worked very supportively with parents to reduce barriers to learning. Pupils' learning is closely monitored and reviewed. As a result, their progress, including that of the most able, has rapidly improved.
- The work of leaders to support the progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is highly effective. Arrangements for their assessment, identification of needs and support closely involve parents and pupils. Leaders, teachers and teaching assistants work very closely together to agree on the right help for these pupils. Progress reviews undertaken by leaders and staff are purposeful and quickly lead to effective action when additional help is required. As a result of this effective provision, these pupils are making good progress from their many different starting points in the school.
- Leaders and teachers ensure that the curriculum supports pupils to develop a wide range of skills and gain sufficient knowledge across the different subjects. They learn particularly well in reading, writing, mathematics, sciences, music, physical education and art. However, scrutiny of pupils' work in subjects including history, geography and religious education shows that while they are covering important skills, they do not currently complete written work to the same quality or depth found in other subjects.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all pupils are provided with opportunities to thoroughly develop their knowledge and written skills in subjects across the broad curriculum, including history, geography and religious education
- teachers pay closer attention to all groups of pupils in lessons and act quickly when any are unsure of how to tackle the next level of work
- lower-attaining pupils are provided with the support they need to recall and make thorough use of their knowledge and skills, particularly with written work.

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

Yours sincerely

David Turner
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection, I met with you, senior leaders and three members of the governing body. I also met with four members of staff to discuss their professional development. I visited classrooms with you in order to observe teaching and learning. I looked at pupils' work in books and spoke with pupils throughout the day, as well as holding a meeting with pupils from each year group. A discussion with three members of the governing body helped to provide me with additional information. School documentation, assessment information, policies and information posted on the school website were also taken into account. I scrutinised a range of documentation about the school's safeguarding work, including the single central record. I took account of 161 responses to Parent View, the online questionnaire for parents, 87 text-free comments from parents, and 31 responses to the online staff questionnaire. I also looked at 106 responses to the pupil questionnaire.