

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



7 September 2017

Mr Charles Parfitt
Headteacher
Alma Park Primary School
Errwood Road
Levenshulme
Manchester
M19 2PF

Dear Mr Parfitt

Short inspection of Alma Park Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 July 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 May 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 provide decisive and lucid leadership that puts pupils at the heart of all you do. You are quick to point out that this is made possible by the efforts of your extended leadership team. As a team, you have a realistic and sharp understanding of where the school's many strengths lie and the areas in which you need to make improvements. You go the extra mile to ensure that pupils feel safe and happy at school, so they can make good progress. Pupils relish the opportunities you provide them with, from caring teachers, 'forest schools' and the 'signing' choir to a wide range of sports. As one pupil said, 'There is never a dull moment at Alma Park.'

While pupils attain standards that are at least in line with national averages across early years and key stage 1, you are aware that attainment in reading at key stage 2 is not as good as it could be. You have analysed why this is and have put in place actions to tackle the issue. Reading is now the focus for improvement for the next academic year. The differences in progress between boys and girls are diminishing. A parent told me that her daughter 'starts and finishes the day with an enormous amount of enthusiasm for learning'.

The proportion of pupils working at greater depth has improved because teachers are typically providing more challenge. However, this is not yet consistent in all classes, particularly in Years 4 and 5. That said, you identify and act on underperformance in a swift and focused way, and support is in place to ensure that

improved gains are realised in those year groups.

Leaders and teachers have adopted a new assessment system that provides the information needed to track the progress that pupils are making. This system is becoming well established in reading, writing and mathematics. Although you are able to speak convincingly about the quality of provision in other subjects, the tracking and assessment procedures in these areas are less secure. You know that subject leaders need to embed assessment and tracking procedures in subjects other than reading, writing and mathematics. This will allow them to measure the progress being made in their subject areas more accurately.

You have driven forward many new initiatives to tackle the areas identified for improvement at your last inspection and, as a result, the progress that pupils now make is improving. The most able pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities now make faster progress than their peers nationally.

Governors have a good understanding of the school's performance and how this compares with that of other schools in the country. They use data well to ask challenging questions and provide effective support and challenge for leaders and staff. They keep abreast of their statutory duties, for example by ensuring that the website is fully compliant. They take their own professional development seriously and routinely undertake training to keep themselves up to date with recent changes in education policy and practice. Consequently, governors have the necessary skills and experience to be effective in their link roles. The guiding principle in all governors' decisions is 'How will it make a positive difference to pupils?'

Parents, pupils and the majority of staff are extremely positive about your leadership and management. Pupils' attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning are exemplary and the curriculum is inspiring. As one pupil from early years pointed out succinctly, 'We work hard here. It's not easy using capital letters, full stops and finger spaces you know! But we do it because we want to do well.'

Safeguarding is effective.

All policies and practices are up to date, and staff receive regular training and support so they are aware of and alert to the need to keep children safe. Staff who are new to the school receive thorough training to ensure that they understand the school's systems and procedures. The checks that leaders undertake on the suitability of adults to work with children are robust. This is evident from recruitment procedures through to the quality of record-keeping and involvement with external agencies and parents.

Pupils I spoke to said that they feel safe at school. They consider bullying and name-calling to be rare events and they are confident that any member of staff will listen to them if they have concerns. Any notes posted by pupils into the 'Worry Box' are dealt with appropriately in a timely manner. Extensive work on staying safe online means that pupils know how to keep themselves safe from inappropriate adult attention. Parents said that this is a safe school that produces confident, well-

rounded children who have high aspirations for the future.

Inspection findings

- The inspection considered a number of key lines of enquiry. One of these focused on the accuracy of the school's self-evaluation. It is clear that you work very effectively with governors and know the school well. My visit did not uncover anything you were not aware of about teaching or pupils' outcomes. Action is already under way to tackle any relative weaknesses. Your carefully crafted action plan is an effective vehicle for leading the school towards further success. As soon as a shortcoming is spotted, you take appropriate action. For example, current progress information shows that there is still some work to be done to ensure that pupils make more rapid progress in reading so that they are in line with national averages, particularly at key stage 2. You have made this a priority and have already implemented a number of changes to address this. Capacity to bring about further improvement is strong.
- Checks on teaching are frequent and result in clear and accurate advice to help teachers improve. Teachers are supported well. They work well together to share good practice both within the school and with the local cluster of schools. Teachers make the most of the many opportunities provided through external training. Teaching assistants also benefit from appraisals and targeted training. However, some teaching assistants who completed the online survey said that they find the changes in their roles and responsibilities challenging.
- A second focus of the inspection was how well different groups of pupils are performing. Alma Park is a fully inclusive school. Pupils with hearing impairment are integrated into mainstream classes whenever possible. All pupils learn British Sign Language so they are able to communicate effectively with each other in classes and during play, so no one feels left out. It was inspiring to see all the key stage 2 pupils alongside the staff signing the words to a song in the hall.
- The progress that the most able pupils make is tracked and analysed with greater precision. More pupils are now working at greater depth, particularly in writing and mathematics. Interventions are timely and precise, with a strong focus on developing pupils' skills in working independently. As a result, pupils support each other well and are becoming highly adept at solving problems.
- A third line of enquiry considered the quality of early years provision. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development in the early years has risen consistently for the past three years. Assessment on entry is accurate and shows just how well children achieve from their low starting points. The provision in early years inspires pupils who leave ready for key stage 1, with secure foundations and inquisitive minds.
- Pupils' attainment is in line with national averages in mathematics and writing. However, the progress being made in reading by pupils in key stage 2 is not yet rapid enough to ensure that outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics combined are where they should be.
- Discussions with pupils, parents and staff made it abundantly clear that this is a happy, inclusive school where all pupils thrive. Pupils enjoy coming, as evidenced

by the improved rates of attendance and reduction in the number of pupils who are persistently absent. Pupils told me that there is very little, if any, bullying and that everyone is friendly. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and parents have full confidence in the school. At the time of the previous inspection, behaviour and safety were judged to be outstanding, and this inspection would indicate that this aspect of the school's provision has also been maintained.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the proportion of pupils making good progress in reading increases, particularly at key stage 2
- subject leaders' knowledge and understanding of how well pupils achieve in subjects other than English and mathematics are strengthened
- the effectiveness of the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics is consistently good in Years 4 and 5, so that combined outcomes are in line with national expectations.

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

Yours sincerely

Maggie Parker
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, your deputy and three assistant headteachers and four members of the governing body. I also spoke to a representative from the local authority. With you, I conducted a learning walk and visited most classes and had the opportunity to speak to pupils and see some of their work. I met with a group of pupils during the day, spoke with a number of parents at the school gates and took account of 72 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. I also considered 42 responses to the staff survey and one response to the pupil questionnaire. I scrutinised your assessment information, school improvement planning, the single central record and other safeguarding procedures and practices.