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9 November 2017

Mr Gregory Hill
Headteacher
Howard Junior School
Parkway
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Dear Mr Hill

Short inspection of Howard Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 17 October 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 predecessor 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 and your leadership team have ensured that the school is a happy and vibrant place for pupils to learn. You have created a stimulating learning environment which extends beyond the classrooms into the corridors. Your 'Harry Potter' themed library is inviting and encourages a love of reading both fiction and non-fiction books, particularly for boys. Your 'Doctor Who' corridor, into which pupils enter through a traditional police box door, makes innovative use of digital communications technology and motivates pupils to be inquisitive and curious learners in the presence of characters from the television series.

You and your subject leaders plan strategically for school improvement. Indeed, every subject leader has produced an improvement plan which forms part of your whole-school planning process. When considered as one document, there is potential for this to become unwieldy, and it would benefit from being streamlined so that it is easier to measure progress and it becomes more user-friendly, especially for the governing body when they need to hold you to account.

Pupils are very well-mannered, wear their uniform with great pride and speak very positively of the opportunities they are given in school to learn and make good progress. You have maintained high levels of behaviour in the school by rewarding

pupils who do the right thing, and using appropriate sanctions for pupils who do not meet your and their teachers' expectations. When I visited lessons to observe pupils learning, I was impressed by the host pupils who welcomed me with a handshake, explained what they were learning and invited me to ask them questions.

Teachers convey enthusiasm for their subject and carefully plan for pupils' learning. This planning includes a range of tasks which aim to challenge pupils, whatever their ability. I observed pupils making well-considered choices about whether to select a 'paddling', 'snorkelling' or 'diving' task, with many choosing the more-demanding 'diving' tasks.

Pupils work well together in lessons, make good use of resources, including the digital tablets which all pupils are loaned during their four years at the school, and know the targets they are given by their teachers. I observed pupils keenly using digital tablets in a computing lesson where they were using computer gaming activities to deepen their understanding of computer coding in your 'Spark Lab'.

Pupils' progress in 2017, at the end of key stage 2, was average in reading, well above average in writing and above average in mathematics. Boys' progress was weaker than girls' in reading, and some pupils with high prior attainment did not make the progress they should have in mathematics. Because progress in reading dipped in 2017, this meant that the combined score for reading, writing and mathematics fell below the national average.

You have rightly identified that pupils' spelling is a weaker feature of the grammar, punctuation and spelling test, and my scrutiny of pupils' books supports this finding. However, your school improvement planning correctly identifies the need to address all of these weaknesses, and your proposals to put matters right are appropriate.

Your work with disadvantaged pupils in the school is successful, and differences between this group of pupils and non-disadvantaged pupils nationally are diminishing rapidly.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding children is a high priority throughout the school. All staff have received and read the latest guidance, 'Keeping children safe in education' (2016), and demonstrate a strong awareness of safeguarding issues. All staff have also undergone training in the government's 'Prevent' duty. Staff, including those who join the school mid-year, receive up-to-date training on safeguarding matters. The school's record of recruitment checks of the suitability of staff is compliant with current requirements.

Records of pupils who are at risk of abuse or neglect, or who are deemed to be vulnerable, are very well maintained and informative. Records are kept securely and show clearly how concerns have been resolved. Appropriate external agencies are informed as and when necessary.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry to see whether the school remains good was to consider how well you have addressed the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. These included: matching work better to pupils' needs; improving pupils' mathematical skills; and raising the proportion of pupils who attain at a higher level.
- My scrutiny of teachers' planning and visits to lessons indicate that teachers have a good understanding of the different needs of pupils in their class. They assess pupils' progress regularly and use this information to shape their planning and provide work which challenges pupils further. They identify aspects of learning that pupils have misunderstood, and revisit topics or themes to rectify these misconceptions.
- My discussions with subject leaders provided examples of how you use subjects beyond mathematics to develop pupils' mathematical skills, such as formulas in science and distances in geography. As a result, pupils' progress in mathematics is above average. You acknowledge that further work is required to ensure that a greater proportion of pupils with high prior attainment make the progress of which they are capable in mathematics.
- You have also planned for spelling to remain a focus across the school, as you have identified that this is a weaker aspect of the grammar, punctuation and spelling tests.
- My second line of enquiry was to look at the impact of leaders in promoting pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare. This was because a substantial proportion of parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, had expressed their concerns about these aspects of the provision. The evidence I gathered suggests that these concerns are unfounded.
- Pupils I selected from Years 5 and 6, to discuss their welfare, spoke positively about you, their teachers and the school in general. They feel safe, well cared for and struggle to think about how the school could improve. In lessons, they have positive attitudes towards their learning and they enjoy their learning. Incidents of unacceptable behaviour are rare.
- They have a good understanding of fundamental British values through the subjects they study and the wide range of extra-curricular activities you offer them. They regularly come into contact with people of other faiths and arrange activities to support people who are less fortunate than themselves, including charity fundraising and the collection of food for local food banks. Positive views from parents include: 'I feel at ease knowing my child's future is in safe hands.'
- You work hard to ensure that pupils have high aspirations and you focus on promoting their self-esteem. Teachers ensure, through consistently high expectations and well-targeted support, that pupils achieve well. Pupils' leadership skills are developed systematically from starting at the school until the time they leave. You actively encourage pupils to become members of the school council, peer mediators, eco-leaders and digital leaders. Pupils in Year 5 proudly spoke about their upcoming performance in one of Shakespeare's plays in

Norwich.

- My third line of enquiry looked at how successfully you engage and communicate with parents. This was because, despite it being an effective school, some parents continue to have negative perceptions. You celebrate pupils' achievements through regular colourful and detailed newsletters which are distributed to parents in your drive to engage them in their children's education.
- Your school website is both detailed and highly informative and allows parents to access up-to-date information. It also makes clear how they can make contact with the school and how they can request copies of any school policies. Reporting to parents on their child's progress is also of good quality and takes place regularly.
- My final line of enquiry looked at how accurately your teachers assess the progress that pupils make. This was because teachers' assessments of pupils' progress in writing showed it to be well above average at the end of key stage 2 in 2017, but national test results for grammar, punctuation and spelling did not reflect this rate of progress.
- Closer analysis of achievement information shows that the spelling aspect of the national test pulled down pupils' overall results. You have rightly identified the need to focus on spelling in your current school improvement plan. In lessons, I observed pupils actively looking up words on their digital tablets if they were unsure of how to spell them. My scrutiny of teachers' marking of pupils' work shows that attention is drawn to the misspelling of words. You also work collaboratively within the school and with other schools to moderate teachers' assessments of the progress that pupils make. This ensures that teachers' assessments are largely accurate.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the focus on raising standards in reading is maintained, particularly for boys
- spelling remains a key focus across the school
- a greater proportion of pupils with high prior attainment make rapid progress in reading and mathematics
- strategic school improvement planning is sharpened and streamlined so that the governing body is able to hold senior leaders to account more effectively.

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

John Daniell
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and other senior leaders, as well as a group of middle leaders, to discuss progress since the previous inspection. I met with the chair and the vice chair of the governing body to gain their views on the school. I also made a telephone call to one parent at her request. This inspection was quality assured by a Senior Her Majesty's Inspector (SHMI).

I scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including your self-evaluation summary document, the school's plans for improvement, and assessment information for all year groups. I held a meeting to examine the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures, the records of checks that leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children, and information relating to attendance.

I undertook observations of teaching and learning across the school, viewed work in pupils' books, and spoke with pupils about their learning when visiting lessons. I took account of the views of 18 staff who responded to the online survey and 13 responses to the pupil survey. I also considered the 53 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, 'Parent View'.