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10 January 2018

Emma McGuigan
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs McGuigan

Short inspection of Holtsmere End Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 12 December 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 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 have been effective in improving the school since the previous inspection. You have addressed both the identified areas for improvement well and improved the curriculum and assessment further. You have a detailed school improvement plan setting out clear priorities, and your efforts to raise standards are based on accurate assessment information. You have received good support from the deputy headteacher and subject leaders and developed greater consistency in the use of assessment by staff across the school. You use the outcomes well to set whole-school targets for improvement. You and school leaders have implemented the new arrangements for the national curriculum well and provided an extensive range of enrichment opportunities, through clubs and visits, including a residential visit for older pupils. You have worked closely with other schools to ensure that teacher assessments are accurate.

You are ensuring that the quality of teaching is leading to good outcomes. As a result, attainment has risen sharply from 2016 when it was broadly average to above average in 2017, and pupils now make good progress in all subjects from their different starting points. School leaders and governors are consistently communicating high expectations and ambition for the school. You have maintained effective management of teachers' performance by rigorously monitoring the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and providing continuous professional support and

training for staff. Staff morale is high, as seen in the overwhelmingly positive responses to the staff questionnaires. You enjoy the confidence of parents, most of whom are very positive about the work of the school and its impact on the good progress their children are making. One parent wrote about her child's increase in confidence since moving to the school, explaining how pleased she is about her daughter's progress and how she would recommend the school to others. This was typical of the positive comments received.

Leaders promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively across the school. Pupils learn about different cultures and religions through religious education, music and art and by visiting different places of worship. They have a good understanding of British values. They learn about democracy through elections to the school council and develop an understanding of the rule of law through abiding by the code of conduct. Pupils behave very well in lessons and around the school and are polite and courteous to visitors. Parents, pupils and staff all said that behaviour is usually good.

Leaders have an accurate view of the school, based on monitoring. However, your self-evaluation does not explain why the school is not outstanding, and the judgements made are not always convincingly based on pupil outcomes. Leaders have rightly developed plans to strengthen the teaching of phonics in Years 3 and 4 to improve reading and spelling further.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team and governors have ensured that all safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose and records are suitably detailed and of high quality.

You work closely with parents to promote the safety and well-being of pupils. Pupils said that they feel safe and parents and staff agree. Leaders provide workshops for parents, which cover aspects of safety and well-being. The school provides up-to-date information and guidance to parents on its website and through regular newsletters. All training in child protection and safeguarding is up to date with key staff and a governor trained in safer recruitment. Your procedures for vetting the suitability of staff and visitors to work with children are rigorous. Staff maintain high levels of supervision throughout the school day to ensure that pupils stay safe. Pupils move around the school safely and handle equipment safely, including computers. You have recently had a successful health and safety audit in the school.

Staff provide clear guidance to pupils on how to use the internet safely, and you have trained some pupils as digital leaders to promote the safe use of the internet across the school. Pupils also learn how to stay safe through themed assemblies and workshops. Governors discuss safeguarding issues at all committee meetings, and every Friday morning you meet with staff to discuss any matters relating to the safety and well-being of pupils. You have clearly maintained a strong culture of safeguarding across the school.

Inspection findings

- I wanted to find out how well teachers are using assessment throughout lessons to set work at the right level for all pupils because the previous inspection report identified this as an issue for improvement. During our joint visits to lessons, we saw how learning tasks were pitched at the right level for pupils with different prior attainment. This was clear in pupils' books and in the delivery of each lesson. Teachers moved around pupils well to check their progress and supported them in taking their learning forward as soon as they were ready. All teachers set appropriate levels of challenge for pupils in their planning. These include extension activities. Pupils were seen working through each level of challenge to the best of their ability, making rapid and secure gains in attainment over time. Pupils said that their work is pitched at the right level and, although challenging, the tasks they are given are neither too hard nor too easy.
- Teaching assistants provide very good support for pupils because they are clearly involved in planning. They move pupils' learning onto the next challenge as soon as pupils are ready. They provide good support strategies for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and for disadvantaged pupils. All the staff are making good use of ongoing assessment to set work at the right levels for pupils of all abilities.
- Another of my key lines of enquiry related to the effectiveness of teaching and learning in mathematics because pupils did not do quite as well in mathematics as they did in writing. The mathematics leader has held a parents' evening to introduce them to the concept of age-related expectations in mathematics. School leaders have ensured that teachers are providing enough opportunities for problem solving and deepening pupils' mathematical reasoning skills. This was seen in lessons and in pupils' work over time. Pupils are developing their ability to calculate with confidence because teachers are focusing on the development of fluency, reasoning and problem solving. Teachers provide a stimulating classroom environment to generate interest in mathematics, through the display of pupils' work. This also promotes good attitudes to learning, and all pupils said how much they enjoyed mathematics.
- The teaching of mathematics is clearly effective across the school. All the teachers are addressing misconceptions in mathematics as they arise because the mathematics leader has shown them how to do this and has developed a system of continuous mathematics assessment. The school's data clearly shows that all groups of pupils are making good progress in mathematics from their different starting points. In a Year 4 lesson, pupils were challenged to explain how they calculated the values of missing digits in a problem-solving activity and they were able to do so well.
- I also wanted to know whether all groups of pupils are achieving as well as they should be, especially those that find learning most difficult. Most lessons seen, the school's own monitoring over time and the work in pupils' books show that pupils of all abilities are making good progress from their different starting points. However, in upper key stage 2, a very small number of disadvantaged pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities have not made enough progress in previous years

because they were not supported effectively enough. Nevertheless, they are benefiting from good support now and making good progress. The recent local authority review of the school's work suggests that most pupils across the school, including the most vulnerable, are making good progress over time in reaching at least age-related expectations.

- In 2017, the work of subject leaders in strengthening teaching and the use of assessment led to a rapid rise in attainment as the percentage of pupils reaching age-related expectations or above was above the national figures for reading, writing, mathematics and for spelling, punctuation and grammar. The school also achieved all its own targets to raise achievement. Leaders successfully narrowed the gap between boys' and girls' attainment and the progress made by disadvantaged pupils compared with that made by other pupils nationally.
- Pupils' books and their learning in lessons show that all groups of pupils, including boys and girls, and low, middle and higher attainers, are making good progress towards their targets. However, in a very small number of lessons visited, a few of the youngest pupils who had fallen behind in phonics were not making enough progress because the pace of learning was too slow. The leaders for writing and reading have rightly identified the need to strengthen phonics teaching in Years 3 and 4 to improve reading and spelling further.
- Another area of focus was how well leaders are ensuring that attendance improves. This focus was chosen because in 2016, there was a dip in attendance, especially for a small group of vulnerable pupils. The school's figures show that attendance rates have increased since the previous inspection to above average. The school actively promotes attendance through its systems of rewards and celebration assemblies, and leaders closely monitor attendance. Parents are given clear guidance on attendance and punctuality through the school website and newsletters and, where necessary, leaders quickly convene a meeting with parents to resolve any issues.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leaders at all levels sharpen self-evaluation so the judgements are based on rigorous analysis of the impact of the school's work on outcomes and use this to identify ways to make the school outstanding
- they implement their plans to strengthen the teaching of phonics so that pupils in Years 3 and 4 increase their knowledge of the sounds letters make and use these effectively to improve their reading and spelling.

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

Declan McCarthy
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, other school leaders and three governors to discuss the progress since the previous inspection. I also held telephone conversations with your school improvement partners. I met with a group of eight pupils and looked at the 20 responses from pupils' questionnaires to seek their views. I carried out joint visits to every classroom with you and talked to pupils about their learning in their lessons. I examined the 13 responses to Parent View, including the nine free text responses. I also looked at the 15 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire for staff. I examined the school's website to check for compliance. I looked at a range of documentation including: the most recent local authority review of the school; the whole-school records of the progress pupils are making over time; your school improvement plan and self-evaluation document; your policies and procedures for safeguarding; the records of checks made on the suitability of staff and visitors to work with children; attendance figures and records of behavioural incidents.