

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Callum Brown
Principal
Orchard Academy
Springfield Boulevard
Springfield
Milton Keynes
Buckinghamshire
MK6 3HW

Dear Mr Brown

Short inspection of Orchard Academy

Following my visit to the school on 20 February 2018, 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Following a period of turbulence last academic year when results dipped and the turnover of staff was high, the school is now on a surer footing. When you took up your post in September 2017, you swiftly ensured that existing and new staff gelled together to form a cohesive staff team. You have also provided effective guidance and support for leaders, the majority of whom are new to their roles. You enjoy the support of your staff and rightly have high ambitions for the school, aspiring for it to provide the best education possible. To this end you have successfully developed the curriculum so a wider range of subjects are taught. You astutely recognise that, although you have overseen a number of fruitful improvements, there are some aspects of the school which need further development.

You have ensured that the values of tolerance and high ambition that are expressed in your 'school creed' are promoted effectively. Pupils attend well and are keen participants in after-school clubs, many of which have an international theme. There is an impressively purposeful atmosphere in the school. When we visited classes, I noticed that pupils were intent on their learning and were eager to share their thoughts on the tasks that they were completing. Pupils who spoke to me were very positive about their experience of school, acknowledging how pupils' behaviour in class has improved over recent months. They were especially excited by their learning in different subjects, such as French, science, art and geography. However, some pupils mentioned that the work that teachers set for them is not always

challenging enough.

You have wisely focused on bedding in the new approach to tracking pupils' progress. The system now provides you with a comprehensive picture of pupils' progress, including the progress of different groups of pupils. Pupils' progress in writing is remarkably strong, indicating that you have successfully implemented the areas for improvement from the school's previous inspection report. You are not complacent and strive for all pupils to fulfil their potential. You make effective use of information from tracking to identify those pupils who need additional help, and to pinpoint where practice in teaching needs further development. Due to better teaching, progress in mathematics and reading is generally improving. However, from your sharp analysis you have accurately identified that most-able pupils do not always make sufficiently rapid progress, most noticeably in reading.

The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), in post since September 2017, has worked hard to improve the local authority's resource base for pupils with autism spectrum disorder. In so doing, she has made good use of information and guidance provided by the local SENCo network. Work belonging to pupils who are supported in the base indicates that they take pride in their writing and are making progress. However, as identified in the accurate audit commissioned by the multi-academy trust (MAT) to which the school belongs, there is more to do. You have well-considered plans in place to improve the provision, including by relocating it in the new building which is currently under construction.

The school has benefited from support provided by the MAT. Of note is the effective and speedy way in which the MAT appointed an interim principal for the summer term 2017. During the summer term, the interim principal, the local governing body and trustees worked successfully together to ensure that the school would be fully staffed from September. They shrewdly identified this as essential for the continued development of the school. More recently, governors have made sure that you receive the right type of support and guidance. Nevertheless, they insist that improvements are pacy so that the high expectations they hold for all pupils, including those eligible for additional funding, are met.

Safeguarding is effective.

The designated safeguarding lead has ensured that safeguarding records and procedures are effective and fit for purpose. She has established a tight system which provides a helpful overview of each pupil's concerns, no matter how minor. The designated lead uses this overview well to decide upon appropriate follow-up actions, including referrals to the local authority. The designated lead has had extensive training in all aspects of safeguarding, including issues that are culturally sensitive, such as female genital mutilation. As a consequence, leaders vigilantly track attendance patterns. In particular, they follow up promptly on pupils who do not return to school on the specified date after trips abroad.

The school works closely with families to ensure that they are aware of the dangers of social media and how to assist their children in staying safe when online. Where

necessary, the designated safeguarding lead has provided additional bespoke support to families, especially those who are experiencing difficulties with accommodation.

Inspection findings

- We agreed to focus on exploring the success you have had in improving writing. We also reviewed the impact that new subject leaders are having on improving reading and mathematics following a dip in outcomes in the 2017 key stage 2 tests and assessments.
- New subject leaders are well supported and are currently accessing leadership training from an external provider. You are working closely with new subject leaders to develop a variety of approaches to improve teachers' practice. For example, there are now carefully planned opportunities for subject leaders, accompanied by one other teacher, to observe good practice in teaching. This is helping subject leaders to embed effective approaches across the school.
- As identified in your tracking information, the vast majority of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are continuing to make very impressive progress in writing. The new leader for English is building on the firm foundations already in place for writing. For instance, he has enhanced approaches to assessing writing. Teachers now share examples of assessed writing with colleagues from both within the school and across the MAT. This is assisting teachers in assessing writing accurately as well as in developing new and interesting writing tasks.
- Pupils' outcomes in mathematics and reading are improving due to better teaching. In some classes we visited, pupils' learning in mathematics was enhanced because teachers made good use of strong subject knowledge to explain difficult abstract concepts clearly. However, in other classes, teachers did not outline next steps for those pupils who had completed all the work they had been set.
- In some classes, we observed teachers using well-thought-out approaches to deepen pupils' understanding of vocabulary found in the unfamiliar text they were reading. However, in other classes, approaches did not support most-able pupils well enough. This was because this group already knew the definition of the majority of the words or had developed their own successful methods for working out what a word means.
- Another aspect of your school we focused on during the inspection was the resource base. The SENCo has made a good start on improving many aspects of the provision, including the way that progress is tracked for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. She agrees that information from a range of sources, such as baseline assessments, needs to be pulled together to provide a more fine-grained picture of pupils' progress. On both occasions when I observed learning in the resource base, some activities did not meet pupils' needs well enough and the pupils became unsettled.
- We also agreed to focus on how MAT leaders and the local governing body have supported the school through a turbulent period, and whether their expectations are high enough. The external audits which have been carefully commissioned by

governors and MAT directors support school improvement well. This is because they are stringent and accurately pinpoint weaker areas. You rightly use the findings from these audits to prioritise your next steps. Governors also keep a watch on the areas identified as weaker, monitoring the pace and impact of improvements.

- Finally, we explored how inclusive the school is and how well pupils who have had difficult experiences either in this country or abroad are supported. Pupils' responses to the Ofsted survey were very positive. Of the 182 responses to the pupil survey, the overwhelming majority said that they enjoy learning and that they feel safe. The pupils with whom I met spoke about their school in glowing terms. They described how the school is friendly and how any kind of bullying is 'simply not permitted'. The school's main transition-partner school, Shepherdswell Academy, is part of the same MAT. The two schools work very closely together, sharing planning and passing information on individual pupils so that they settle in well. The majority of parents I spoke with at the end of the school day praised the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- planned improvements to the resource-base provision are swiftly implemented and carefully checked to make sure that pupils' individual needs are fully met
- most-able pupils are provided with the level of challenge they need to make the very strong progress of which they are capable.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local governing body, the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Milton Keynes. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I checked safeguarding arrangements, including the records of recruitment checks, policies and procedures. I reviewed a range of information, which included the school's own evaluation and improvement plans, external audits and information about pupils' progress. I observed pupils' learning in mathematics, reading and writing across all year groups, accompanied by the principal. I made two visits to the Cedar Class, which is the resource base for pupils with autism spectrum disorder. On one occasion I was accompanied by the principal. I also met separately with senior leaders, a group of subject leaders and the designated safeguarding lead. A meeting was held with the chair of the local governing body,

accompanied by the head of education for the MAT (who was also the interim principal during last summer term and the executive principal for a short time after that) and the MAT's chief executive officer. I undertook a scrutiny of pupils' work and also met with a small group of pupils. After school, I spoke informally with parents as they collected their children. I also scrutinised results from the 10 parents who responded to the Parent View questionnaire, as well as 182 responses to the pupil survey and 13 responses to the staff survey.