

28 June 2018

Mr Steven Lloyd
Headteacher
Sauncey Wood Primary School
Pickford Hill
Harpenden
Hertfordshire
AL5 5HL

Dear Mr Lloyd

Short inspection of Sauncey Wood Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 June 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 March 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. In a period in which there have been several changes, including staffing changes, you have successfully preserved the caring, supportive ethos and community spirit of Sauncey Wood Primary School, which is valued by pupils and parents. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. This is evident in the many positive comments written in Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. Examples include: 'The school treats every child as an individual' and 'Each individual child blossoms holistically.' One parent stated, 'I couldn't wish for a better school for my children to attend', while another added, 'This school is a little hidden gem in Harpenden.'

Many parents also commented positively upon the difference you and your deputy headteacher have made since you started at the school, due to your 'dedication, passion and enthusiasm' and the 'high standards and values' you have. All staff agreed the school is well led. Staff are proud to be members of the school and enjoy working there. They particularly value that you seek their views, so they feel 'part of the school journey', and the importance you place on their well-being. You have used professional development to encourage, challenge and support teachers' improvement. The school has strengthened leadership by investing in specific training to develop senior and middle leaders. This has assisted them in their work to drive improvements, particularly in early years provision and phonics.

Pupils are very polite and well behaved due to their understanding of the school's values. They enjoy coming to school and think it is 'magnificent', due to the range

of interesting opportunities you provide. As a result, attendance has improved over recent years and is now broadly in line with the national average.

In collaboration with your leadership team and the governing body, you are addressing effectively the priorities identified in your school improvement plan. The previous inspection identified that work set lacked opportunities for pupils to use their knowledge of calculations to solve problems in mathematics. You have tackled this through improvements to the teaching, learning and assessment of mathematics across the school. Pupils now have a greater range of resources to support their understanding of calculation methods and apply this knowledge to real-life contexts. As a result, pupils' achievements in mathematics are improving across the school.

You took effective action to improve provision in the early years and correctly judge it now to be a strength of the school. This has been recognised by your recent achievements in gaining the local authority's early years quality standard gold award. Strong leadership in early years has ensured that children make good progress in their learning. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development has continued to rise and is above the national average. This is because staff ensure that expectations are high, routines are clear, and tasks are typically engaging and well matched to children's needs.

You recognise that there are still areas which need to improve. For example, you acknowledge that the most able pupils could make better progress in writing from their starting points. You also know that boys, across the school, are not making enough progress in reading, writing and mathematics. You rightly identify that differences remain between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils compared with that of other pupils nationally and that their attendance needs to improve further.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors, have ensured that safeguarding is a priority of the school and all arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding undertake appropriate training. Staff receive up-to-date information through meetings they attend with leaders and regular training in safeguarding ensures that they are able to follow the school's procedures. The school's records are detailed and maintained well. They show where there has been involvement of support agencies, with actions followed up in a timely way. Pupils told me that they always feel safe and happy in school. They know that they have adults in school who will listen and help. Pupils define bullying accurately and state that it rarely happens in the school. E-safety is promoted well throughout the school, which ensures that pupils know how to stay safe online. Pupils explained to me that through personal development lessons and specific activities, such as Bikeability, they understand how to keep themselves safe in different situations. All parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that their children are kept safe.

Inspection findings

- To confirm that the school remained good, one of my key lines of enquiry was about pupils' progress and attainment in writing across the school. This was because the school's published data shows that, at the end of each key stage, pupils' achievement in writing has been weaker than in reading and mathematics.
- Recently, you have focused on improving writing across the school, in particular by improving the teaching of grammar, punctuation and spelling. Pupils are using a variety of prompts on display to help them with their writing and say that the 'spelling flaps' have really helped them to spell words correctly. I found that pupils in all year groups have opportunities to produce extended pieces of writing to increase their writing stamina, for a range of purposes, audiences and text types. Current school information demonstrates that more pupils are making strong progress in writing. Even so, we agreed that not enough pupils, especially the most able, are writing at greater depth within the expected standard in Year 2 and Year 6.
- You have concentrated on improving the teaching of reading with the view that good readers will also become good writers. The profile of reading has risen in the school through the launch of the new library area, author visits and reading challenges which encourage more reading at home. Older pupils read to younger pupils, which has helped them to develop their own learning skills. Some pupils have attended a 'reading café', by invitation with their parents, to develop their reading skills.
- Children in early years have taken part in a 'story box' project to develop language skills, which has had a positive impact on reading and writing outcomes at the end of Reception. Appropriate training for staff in teaching phonics, and taking part in the local authority screening programme, has helped to increase the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics screening check in Year 1. The proportion is close to the national average.
- My second key line of enquiry was about boys' achievements across the school. Historically, boys achieve less well across the school in reading, writing and mathematics compared to other pupils nationally.
- You have taken decisive action since you met with boys to discuss their learning. You have adapted the curriculum to ensure that it includes themes which motivate the boys and considers their learning styles, such as providing more opportunities to use technology and learn outside. You have also installed an all-weather outdoor running track so that pupils can take part in the 'daily mile' to improve their physical and mental well-being so that they are ready to learn. Pupils and parents agree that this is a great addition to improve learning. It is too early to provide evidence to show that these approaches are making a difference.
- I also sought to establish how well disadvantaged pupils achieve. While the number of these pupils in each year group is small, you acknowledge they do not perform as well as other pupils in school and other pupils nationally. Pupils who are disadvantaged also attend school less often. As a consequence, you have ensured that disadvantaged pupils' progress and attainment are high priorities in your school improvement plan.

- You have recently appointed a new, experienced leader with responsibility for disadvantaged pupils. The leader has gained a good understanding of the barriers to learning that these pupils face through meeting with them. Using this information, she has developed a comprehensive report of how funding can be used effectively in the future and has begun to plan support that is well matched to their needs to enable these pupils to catch up quickly. She has also met with support staff to ensure that she utilises their strengths and can plan further training according to their needs. The new leader has begun to carefully track the progress that each pupil makes following an intervention, which demonstrates the impact it has had. These improvements are too recent to have had an impact on disadvantaged pupils' achievement.
- You have also focused on improving the attendance of disadvantaged pupils to ensure that they access the curriculum as fully as possible. Through a range of strategies, including attendance awards and meeting with families, the attendance rates have improved for some of these pupils. Disadvantaged pupils' attendance remains a priority.
- Finally, I evaluated how effectively leaders and governors deal with parental concerns and situations of poor behaviour and bullying. Leaders work hard to ensure a good partnership with parents. If an issue arises, leaders follow the school policies and procedures, seek advice if necessary and reflect on their practice. The very large majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that the school responds well to any concerns that they raise. Parents commented that all staff were very approachable and always listen.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- more pupils, especially the most able, write at greater depth within the expected standard by the end of Year 2 and Year 6
- boys and disadvantaged pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics so that their attainment is at least in line with that of other pupils nationally
- attendance for disadvantaged pupils improves.

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

Rachel Welch
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you to discuss progress since the previous inspection and to agree the key lines of enquiry. I also met with a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body, disadvantaged pupils and the school council. I spoke to the English leader, the leader with responsibility for disadvantaged pupils and a representative from the local authority. I scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including your plans for improvement, local authority reports and assessment information for all year groups. I examined the school's safeguarding procedures, child protection documentation and procedures and information regarding attendance. We visited classrooms and looked at books in all classes. I also looked at 91 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and 30 staff survey returns.