

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Kristina Hollingdale
Headteacher
Hilltop Primary School
Ditchling Hill
Southgate West
Crawley
West Sussex
RH11 8QL

Dear Mrs Hollingdale

Short inspection of Hilltop Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 26 June 2018 with Deirdre Crutchley, Ofsted Inspector, 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 2014.

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 deputy headteachers are ambitious for the school and have a good understanding of its strengths and the areas to develop. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school and the experiences it gives their children. They are quick to comment on the excellent support their children receive, the high expectations and the good communication. One parent commented, 'I feel Hilltop is an extremely well-led school that values each child as an individual.'

You have successfully created a caring and inclusive culture within the school which encourages pupils to broaden their aspirations. All staff are committed to supporting every child and ensuring that all pupils receive the education they deserve. Pupils are well behaved and show good learning behaviours. They are keen to be at school, and talk about their learning and the opportunities offered to them with excitement. Year 6 pupils agree that they are ready to go to secondary school but admit that they will miss Hilltop and the care their teachers take of them.

The senior leadership team focuses relentlessly on improvement and has high expectations of staff and pupils. Robust monitoring and careful coaching ensures that there is consistency of good teaching and learning in English and mathematics across the school. As a result, attainment is above the national average and on an upward trend in early years and key stage 1.

The governing body and the multi-academy trust support you and the school well. Governors use their skills effectively to monitor different aspects of the school and to provide advice and support where necessary. Involvement with other schools in the trust enables the school to gain access to high-quality professional development. Less experienced leaders are regularly given the chance to widen their experience and to work on projects that benefit Hilltop pupils and those in other local schools.

At the time of the last inspection, the school was asked to improve pupils' achievement by ensuring that pupils, particularly those who are more able, move promptly on to more challenging tasks. Leaders' work to address this issue has been successful in mathematics and the technical aspects of English writing. Books show that pupils are given opportunities to tackle challenging tasks. However, you have rightly identified that the most able pupils are not attaining the high standards they are capable of in writing, both in English and across the curriculum, and you have made this an area for development.

The curriculum at Hilltop Primary School gives pupils many opportunities to take part in a wide range of activities. For example, on the day of our visit, one year group was participating in an art activity to be shown at a local armed forces parade. Others were presenting a musical performance to parents or were on a school trip to the beach. Pupils enjoy their experiences and take part with enthusiasm. To further improve progress across the curriculum, you recognise that teachers' use of the new pupil tracking and assessment tool needs to become fully embedded across the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff have a secure understanding of the school's safeguarding expectations, including arrangements for reporting concerns. Referrals are dealt with swiftly due to a comprehensive system of recording and monitoring. Referrals to other agencies are made in an appropriate and timely manner.

The vast majority of parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, felt that their children feel safe at school and are well looked after. Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their own safety and there are opportunities within school to practice this. For example, pupils are taught how to cross roads, buy tickets, make emergency phone calls and stay safe online. Pupils report that they feel safe and know who to speak to if they have a problem.

Inspection findings

- Many children start the school in early years with low communication, language and literacy skills. As a result, leaders have designed a curriculum that promotes the use of rich vocabulary and opportunities to speak. Key texts engage children, and there is a consistent approach to teaching and learning throughout this phase of the school. Children requiring additional support are quickly identified

and individual plans help them to catch up. As a consequence, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development has increased over the last four years and is now above the national average.

- In 2015, there was a dip in the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard in phonics in Year 1. This led to rapid action from leaders and the development of a new approach to phonics teaching which is more suitable to the school's pupils. Regular development opportunities and training ensure that all staff use this approach consistently. Continuous assessment ensures that pupils falling behind are targeted quickly and supported to catch up with their peers. As a result, the proportion of pupils meeting the phonics standard has increased and is now above average.
- The proportion of pupils achieving the higher standard at the end of key stage 2 in the last two years was lower than the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders were quick to address this. Mathematics teaching has been strengthened and pupils are encouraged to reason and demonstrate their learning in both concrete and abstract forms. This has led to an improvement in attainment and progress in mathematics across the school, including for most-able pupils.
- Leaders are also addressing the lower than average proportion of pupils achieving a higher standard in English throughout key stage 2. For example, recent initiatives include encouraging pupils to read widely and choose books more carefully. Consequently, reading is a developing strength of the school. Improving spelling, punctuation and grammar skills has also been a focus. As a result, most pupils reach the standards expected for their ages. However, opportunities for pupils to develop higher-level skills in writing are not consistently available throughout key stage 2, and so the most able pupils do not consistently attain as well as they could.
- Throughout the school there are opportunities to study across a wide curriculum, and pupils are prepared well for the next stages of learning. Leaders have designed the curriculum to ensure that the pupils' prior experiences are taken into account. Pupils are given exciting opportunities in some areas. For example, a comprehensive scheme of learning surrounds the Year 6 production. Pupils take part in performance workshops and learn about stage and set design. Assessment of pupils' learning in all areas of the curriculum has been introduced recently but has yet to be thoroughly embedded. As a result, pupils starting points are not always known, and teachers' expectations are not consistently high.
- Pupil premium funding is used effectively to support the learning and well-being of disadvantaged pupils. You regularly monitor the progress of this group of pupils to ensure that they keep up with their classmates and do not fall behind in their learning. Carefully targeted intervention supports pupils, and the differences between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and that of other pupils in the school are diminishing.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers gain the confidence, knowledge and skills to encourage the most able pupils to develop higher-level writing skills
- assessment for subjects beyond reading, writing and mathematics is implemented effectively and that high expectations for pupils' progress become the norm across the curriculum.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer for The Kemnal Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for West Sussex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tracy Good
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, the deputy headteachers, the assistant headteacher responsible for inclusion, the early years leader and the lead teachers for English and mathematics. I spoke with the regional director for The Kemnal Academy Trust and the vice-chair of the governing body. Inspectors also talked with parents as they dropped their children off at the beginning of the day. We visited classes with senior leaders and reviewed a sample of pupils' work. We evaluated a range of the school's documentation, including the school improvement plan and documents related to safeguarding and attendance. I considered the responses of 41 parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and the 64 responses to the online staff survey.