

4 December 2018

Mrs Michelle Wright  
Headteacher  
Montgomery Junior School, Colchester  
Baronswood Way  
Colchester  
Essex  
CO2 9QG

Dear Mrs Wright

### **Short inspection of Montgomery Junior School, Colchester**

Following my visit to the school on 22 November 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 February 2015.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

The good standard of education noted at the time of the previous inspection has not been maintained. The progress that pupils make in reading and mathematics has fallen below national averages for the last two years, with reading being well below average in 2018. The percentage of pupils attaining the expected standard in reading and mathematics was also below national figures in 2017 and 2018.

Since your appointment to the post of headteacher in September 2018, the actions leaders have taken to improve the quality of education at the school are starting to take effect. These include introducing a new system of checking pupils' progress, protocols for more rigorous management of staff performance, and regular evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning. However, it still is too early to see sustained impact from this work.

When you arrived at the school, you listened to parents and carers, staff and governors, and identified improving behaviour as your priority. I watched a whole-school assembly and found behaviour to be exemplary and largely self-regulating. Pupils joined in the preparation for the Christmas concert with clear enthusiasm, singing for enjoyment and having fun. They all responded to teachers' instructions swiftly, showing that staff have quickly established high expectations of behaviour. I saw good behaviour at break- and lunchtime, when pupils played together

cooperatively and happily. In lessons, pupils are eager, active learners who are ready to take advantage of learning opportunities that teachers provide. Where any rare low-level disruption occurs, pupils are reminded that they must be a member of the 'Green Team', to which all well-behaved pupils belong, and they respond to this approach very well.

The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, agreed that the school makes sure that pupils behave well. Pupils spoke about recent improvement in behaviour and said that they can now 'learn better' in lessons.

There are many bright displays around the school, illustrating a rich and varied curriculum provided to engage pupils' imagination. For example, in a history lesson, pupils were learning to work like an archaeologist, by sifting through a bucket of sand to find pictures of ancient artefacts and buildings in order to establish a timeline of events. Pupils enjoy art, music, science and sporting opportunities. Pupils are grateful of the care and consideration shown to them by staff. One pupil said, 'When my dad goes away on deployment with the Army, the school looks after me really well.' Many pupils join the school in the middle of the school year. One parent commented, 'As a military family, we've joined a number of schools and this one stands head and shoulders above the others in the way it handles the admission and induction programme so that my child is learning and thriving.'

The governing body has recently undergone several changes and has now formed a small, cohesive body providing effective support. Governors have detailed knowledge about the school and are clear about raising achievement for all pupils. They said that much had changed in a short period of time as a result of your determined actions, particularly around improvements in pupils' behaviour. The school improvement plan clearly identifies leaders' intended actions to improve teaching and learning in reading and mathematics.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Pupils say that they feel safe at school and that they are kind to one another. They say that there is no bullying at the school and spoke confidently about how to keep safe when using the internet.

Staff play a significant role in the strong culture of safeguarding that exists in the school. They are appropriately trained and receive regular updates on safeguarding matters. Training for staff in the 'Prevent' duty is also up to date. This equips them with the knowledge to recognise the early signs that a pupil might be at risk, and school records show that they act on any concerns without delay. Notices that are prominently displayed outside the staff room remind staff of the necessity to remain vigilant at all times. The required checks on the suitability of adults to work with children are complete and effective.

As the designated safeguarding lead, you have quickly established a thorough understanding of the complexity of pupils' needs within the school. You work with

appropriate outside agencies to ensure that all necessary steps are taken, so that pupils receive the help they might need.

## **Inspection findings**

- To determine whether the school has remained good, I followed four lines of enquiry that we agreed at the start of the inspection, one of which was safeguarding, which is checked routinely in all inspections. The others were based on issues raised in the last inspection, an analysis of the school's website and recent performance information.
- We agreed that progress measures showed widespread underachievement in reading in 2017 and 2018. Leaders are keen to eradicate this situation and have taken some early action to support pupils' reading. However, they are still seeking out ideas from good practice in other schools to formulate a school-wide approach to raising achievement in reading. Early steps to encourage pupils to read more include a new programme where pupils say they read for a short period after lunch each day. Parents are now encouraged to add positive comments and any concerns to their child's reading diary. Support for pupils whose reading skills are weak now takes place in small groups. The school's own data indicates that this is having a significant impact on those who need to catch up. We saw one session together and noted the early improvements in pupils' reading skills.
- I listened to several pupils read across the school and found that they were mostly fluent and confident readers who use changes in pitch well and could talk about 'what might happen next'. However, all the pupils, including the most able, had chosen to read a book that offered them very little challenge. Pupils currently are not guided by teachers to read books that introduce new vocabulary, contexts and authors. Consequently, pupils are not developing their reading and comprehension skills rapidly, or to their full potential. You told me that plans are in place to introduce a broad range of reading books to the library as a key part of your drive to improve achievement in reading.
- A Year 6 lesson that focused on reading comprehension challenged pupils to read a complex piece of newspaper reporting about the recent wildfires in California. They were able to make sense of unfamiliar words such as 'firenado' and suggest new words such as 'devour' to describe the spread of the fire. This showed that some teachers are starting to raise aspirations of what pupils can read and understand. However, pupils showed that they had yet to develop sufficient confidence in their comprehension skills to evaluate and compare what they had read in a class discussion.
- In the previous inspection report, the school was asked to ensure that high-quality teaching and learning support more learners to achieve the higher standard in mathematics and to improve progress in mathematics across all year groups, including for disadvantaged pupils. In 2017 and 2018, the progress that pupils made in mathematics was below average. Most-able pupils, too, did less well than their peers nationally.
- Leaders have included mathematics in the improvement plans for this year and

have established a new system of monitoring pupils' progress. This has quickly identified that several pupils have gaps in their knowledge about important mathematical skills, for example in the use of decimals and percentages. A focus on assessment information has allowed teachers to plan lessons that support individual pupils to help them make more rapid progress. Pupils' books show that they take care with their mathematics work and use the helpful advice that teachers provide to improve their understanding. Teaching we saw together showed that pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are engaging well with their learning, and are demonstrating an enjoyment and curiosity in mathematics.

- You have established a 'booster' group to support most-able pupils to work at greater depth. Some of these pupils said that they now feel more secure in their mathematical knowledge and could give evidence of this with work in their books. However, a number of most-able pupils said that they could attempt more challenging work in lessons. Teachers have yet to establish consistently high expectations, so that tasks are suitably judged to ensure a greater number of pupils are supported to reach the higher standard.
- My final line of enquiry focused on what actions leaders are taking to ensure that all pupils achieve well, particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), those who join the school in-year and the most able.
- The provision for pupils with SEND is well led. Leaders responded quickly to the poor progress that pupils with SEND made last year. They reviewed and reorganised the ways in which pupils with SEND are supported. An 'enhanced provision' unit now provides learning mentors to small groups of pupils who need support. Together, we saw the strong progress that a group of pupils made in understanding mathematical concepts, which would allow them soon to re-join their peers in the classroom. Staff have raised their expectations for good behaviour, so pupils with SEND are settling down to their learning readily and are making better progress. Leaders carefully check to see that agreed targets are achieved, so that interventions can be adjusted if they are not effective and new plans put in place.
- Most-able pupils underachieved in 2017 and 2018. Part of your plan to bring about improvements is centred on raising aspirations for all pupils, including the most able. Some of these plans have yet to be implemented and for those that have just started (for example in mathematics), it is too soon yet to be sure of their impact.
- Published data in 2017 and 2018 indicates that pupils who join the school after the start of the school year do almost as well as their non-mobile peers. The pupils I spoke to who belong to this group spoke highly of the support they receive from the school to feel welcome. They said that they could settle down quickly to learning and that the school was 'amazing'. Parents, too, spoke of their appreciation for the well-rehearsed systems and protocols that the school has in place to ensure that transition works as well as possible for their child.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers' expectations of what most-able pupils can achieve are raised across all year groups, so that they plan work that is suitably challenging
- pupils read and interpret challenging material across a wider range of contexts to develop their comprehension skills and make good progress in reading by the end of key stage 2
- strategies to support pupils with SEND are fully embedded to enable them to make strong progress
- teachers use current assessment information in mathematics to ensure that work is well matched to pupils' different needs, so that they make good progress.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Kay Leach  
**Ofsted Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, subject leaders, two members of the governing body, and a group of pupils. I listened to several pupils read and spoke to parents at the school gate at the start of the day. I attended an assembly. I spent time outside lessons observing pupils at play and in the lunch hall. You joined me in observing pupils at work in class.

I reviewed the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, and records of behaviour and attendance. I reviewed the single central record, and the safeguarding policy and procedures. I also considered 23 free-text responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 15 responses to the questionnaire for staff.