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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Sonia Fenner
Headteacher
Hexton Junior Mixed and Infant School
Hexton
Hitchin
Hertfordshire
SG5 3JL

Dear Mrs Fenner

Short inspection of Hexton Junior Mixed and Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 29 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 July 2014.

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.**

Since the previous inspection, there has been turbulence in the leadership of the school. You took up post in September 2018 and are the third headteacher to be appointed since that inspection. You are also the headteacher of another local primary school, sharing your time between the two schools. Since your appointment, you have accurately identified the areas that require improvement in order to ensure that the school remains good. However, you have not yet had time to put your plans to address these into action.

Hexton School provides a welcoming and caring environment. Staff know pupils and their families very well and there are strong relationships between pupils of different ages. They get along very well within their mixed-aged classes and in all areas of school life. On the playground, pupils enjoy using the play equipment and interact together harmoniously. Any pupil who does not have anyone to play with can stand at the 'friendship stop' and other pupils will come and join them.

The school values, known as the 'Hex 6Rs', are understood and shared by the whole school community. They encourage pupils to become resilient, ready, respectful, reflective, responsible and resourceful. Pupils I spoke to showed they had a deep understanding of these values.

Many parents and carers are highly supportive of the school. Some, however, raised their concerns regarding plans to reduce the class structure from three to two mixed-aged classes from January 2019. As a result of this decision, some parents have decided to move their children to other schools.

The previous inspection report asked leaders to improve teaching and to ensure that there was greater consistency in pupils' progress in writing across the school. Since this time, actions have been taken to address these areas for improvement. However, changes in leadership and in teaching staff have meant that leaders' actions have not had sufficient impact on the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils, especially in writing and the early years.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is at the heart of the school's caring and supportive environment. Governors worked effectively with the interim headteacher to ensure that safeguarding systems and procedures were strengthened. The current leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements continue to be fit for purpose. The designated safeguarding leads are suitably trained and ensure that they keep up to date with the most recent government guidance. They work closely with the named governor for safeguarding and ensure that regular monitoring of the school's safeguarding procedures takes place. All staff and governors receive regular training.

Vulnerable pupils and families who may need support are monitored carefully and any concerns are documented and followed up thoroughly through the school's electronic recording system. This also documents concerns relating to behaviour, bullying and first aid.

Pupils feel safe and are very happy at school. They say that behaviour is good and that bullying is rare. They are confident that, if they have fall outs with other pupils, staff will deal with these effectively. There are few incidents involving poor or inappropriate behaviour.

Inspection findings

- The first line of enquiry I pursued was to do with attendance. This was because historical published information showed that pupils' attendance was not as high as it should be. It also indicated that too many pupils were persistently absent.
- Your systems for monitoring the attendance of all pupils are robust. When any pupil is absent, the school contacts parents immediately to determine the reason. Attendance information is scrutinised regularly and letters are sent out to parents when there is any concern about absence. Pupils are rewarded for regular attendance. Newsletters and the school's website promote the importance of regular attendance.
- Currently, the overall level of attendance is slightly above average. However, there remain some pupils who are absent too frequently. Some of this absence is due to parents taking their children out of school for holidays, despite the fact

that this is not authorised. There is more work to do to ensure that all children attend regularly.

- I next focused on the early years. This was because the proportion of children achieving the expected good level of development at the end of the Reception Year in 2017 was too low. I wanted to see if this had improved and to determine how well provision meets the needs of children currently in the mixed Reception and Year 1 class.
- Outcomes in 2018 do show some improvement, but are still well below average. We discussed whether this may be partly due to small numbers of children, because each represents a high percentage. Nevertheless, outcomes should be higher.
- Together, we spent time looking at the organisation of learning in the mixed Reception and Year 1 class. We also considered children's learning journeys. These contain observations of children's activities but do not fully document or show progress in their learning. Additionally, we saw that the expectations for Reception children were not high enough. You have accurately identified that making improvements in the early years provision is a priority for development.
- My third line of enquiry was about progress in writing, as this was an area for improvement identified by the previous inspection. Work in pupils' books shows that they are given a range of writing tasks and that these are developing their writing skills over time. There is, though, some inconsistency. Teachers do not use all the opportunities they could to make writing interesting. The interim headteacher, who was in post last year, put much in place to improve writing across the school. However, there has not been enough time for his actions to have a full impact. Overall, the turbulence in leadership since the time of the previous inspection has impeded the rate of improvement in writing.
- Finally, I considered whether leaders have the capacity to bring about sustained improvement. This was because of the inconsistencies in leadership since the time of the last inspection.
- You have accurately identified strengths and areas for improvement across the school and the right actions to address these. However, you have not yet had enough time to implement your plans. A deputy headteacher has been appointed across both schools and will take up post in January 2019. You are confident that this will add capacity to leadership and teaching. However, there are some uncertainties for the school, which need to be addressed to ensure consistency in the quality of pupils' learning and progress. An appointment has not been made for one of the two classes that will exist from January. Additionally, subject leadership is not confirmed for subjects other than English and mathematics and the English subject leader is new. There is work to be done to ensure that the leadership of the school can drive and maintain improvements.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to act to improve attendance by:
 - providing appropriate support to families whose children do not attend school regularly
 - taking robust action when parents take their children out of school without authorisation
- the improvements that have been made in the teaching of writing are built upon, so that the quality of pupils' writing and the progress they make are consistent across the school
- provision and children's progress in the early years improve, so that the proportion of children achieving a good level of development is close to the national average
- the quality of teaching and learning is strengthened by providing more opportunities for teachers to learn from best practice within and outside of the school
- leadership at all levels strengthens so that there is good capacity for sustained improvement.

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

Joan Beale
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I held discussions with you about the key lines of enquiry for this inspection, the school's self-evaluation of its performance, plans for future improvement and information on current pupils' progress and attainment. Additionally, I met with five governors and held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. We visited all classrooms together, to observe teaching, learning and assessment, and looked at the work in pupils' books in a range of subjects. I met with a group of pupils to talk about their experiences at school. I scrutinised safeguarding policies and practice, including systems for safe recruitment of staff. I gathered the views of parents through the 31 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 24 responses using the free-text service. Additionally, I spoke with 12 parents when they were delivering their children to school and received a letter from one parent.