

# Highfields Primary School

Beeches Road, Rowley Regis, West Midlands B65 0DA

## Inspection dates

12 to 13 March 2019

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Early years provision	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	<b>Good</b>

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- Since her appointment in September 2017, the headteacher has provided strong, determined leadership. She and the senior leadership team have identified the correct priorities to improve the school further and are working hard to address them.
- Governors provide effective strategic direction to support the senior leadership team. New governors are developing their skills to ensure that leaders are held to account.
- Teaching is typically good across the school, resulting in positive pupils' attitudes and good learning. However, in a few classes, expectations are not consistently high enough.
- Attainment in the early years is above the national average. At the end of key stage 1 it is broadly in line. Pupils are now building on this learning more successfully in key stage 2.
- Leaders have successfully improved mathematics teaching across the school. As a result, pupils are now making stronger progress.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who are disadvantaged are making strong progress from their different starting points, as a result of appropriate support.
- Pupils are given a wide range of opportunities to extend their writing across the curriculum. Many older pupils take pride in their work, but others do not take the same care with their handwriting, spelling or punctuation.
- There is a strong safeguarding culture in the school. Leaders make sure that support for vulnerable children and their families is appropriate and timely.
- Pupils enjoy studying a wide range of different subjects. They develop their skills well across the curriculum in subjects such as science, history and geography. The curriculum is well planned by leaders.
- Recent changes in the early years are enabling children to get off to a good start at school. They are well cared for and settle quickly to their learning.
- Pupils' personal development and welfare are good. They behave well in lessons and around the school. They are polite and helpful. They enjoy talking to visitors about their learning.
- Although improving, the teaching of phonics is not yet consistently good.
- Many leaders are new to their roles and are still developing the skills they need to be fully effective.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve outcomes for all pupils, especially for the most able and those who are disadvantaged, by:
  - continuing to strengthen the progress pupils make so that more pupils reach the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics
  - increasing the proportion of pupils who reach the expected standard in phonics by the end of Year 1
  - ensuring that all staff have consistently high expectations of what pupils can do, insisting on high-quality presentation, spelling and punctuation.
- Continue to embed the recent changes in the early years, ensuring that adults use every opportunity to challenge and extend children's thinking and reasoning.
- Continue to develop leadership at all levels by supporting those new to role, including new governors, in order to evaluate fully the impact of their work and to adapt their actions accordingly so that they have a sustained influence on school improvement.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- Since her appointment in September 2017, the headteacher has worked quickly to determine what is required to improve outcomes for pupils across the school. She knows that there is a legacy of underachievement across the school and, supported effectively by other senior leaders, is working hard to promote improvement in all areas.
- The headteacher has empowered other leaders, including governors. New leaders have been appointed and clear roles and areas of responsibility have been established. The headteacher has actively sought external advice and the expertise of a local teaching school and the local authority to support her drive for improvement. Leaders at all levels are now playing a bigger part in driving improvements, but the work of some new leaders is not yet fully embedded in practice.
- Leaders' self-evaluation is accurate. Leaders have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching through regular checking, including through pupils' progress reviews, visits to classrooms and reviews of pupils' written work. A comprehensive cycle of monitoring is now in place and is used well to support teaching staff and raise standards across the school.
- Leaders correctly identify the strengths and areas for development across the school. They use this information to inform their school development plan. Over time, they have refined the development planning process, recognising that they cannot address all their areas of concern at once. The current improvement plan is appropriately focused on key priorities and is regularly reviewed to check for impact.
- Leaders have introduced an effective, robust system for checking the progress and attainment of pupils in each year group. They work continually to ensure that the information gathered is accurate and reflects what pupils know and can do. They welcome an external view, such as that provided by other schools, to moderate and validate their judgements. Leaders have quickly established a secure baseline on which to build.
- Leaders acknowledge that there is more to be done to improve outcomes for pupils, particularly by the end of key stage 2. They recognise where there are gaps in pupils' learning, and support teachers to address these systematically. For example, curriculum changes in teaching mathematics, introduced in September 2018, ensure a coherent approach, resulting in pupils making better progress than they have done before.
- New middle leaders are quickly learning how to carry out their roles. They use information about pupils' achievement to ensure that their actions are focused on the key priorities for further improvement. They are clear about what they need to do and are supported effectively by senior leaders. Lines of accountability have been established, which ensure that roles and responsibilities are understood. However, some middle leaders have only been in post for a short time and their leadership skills are still developing.
- The curriculum is enjoyed by all pupils and covers a wide range of topics and learning

experiences. Leaders continually check that the curriculum develops pupils' interests and ensures that they acquire knowledge in a range of subjects. New themes introduced this year include 'In the news' and one chosen by the pupils. The centenary of World War One was chosen in the autumn term. Pupils have many opportunities to develop their skills in writing as well as specific skills in subjects such as geography and history. Residential visits and trips to places such as Warwick Castle, as well as visitors to the school, further enrich pupils' learning. Leaders are keen to ensure that pupils have first-hand experiences on which to develop their skills and knowledge.

- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. Through assemblies and specific lessons, the school successfully develops values such as friendship, kindness and charity. Leaders work with staff to ensure that any form of discrimination is not tolerated. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Support for pupils with SEND is effective. The leader for this area has a positive impact on the quality of provision for this group of pupils. She has ensured that a well-thought-out structure is in place for the identification, support and review of pupils with SEND. Pupils' needs are carefully assessed. Additional funding is used to provide appropriate support. Pupils' progress is tracked thoroughly, and the leader monitors the impact of the support carefully.
- Leaders identify barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils. Additional funding is used to provide support for learning, as well as for music lessons, visits and trips. Parents are involved in choosing how to spend part of the grant, in order to support their child effectively. Improvements to the quality of teaching this year are resulting in disadvantaged pupils making better progress than they have in the past.
- Specific funds for school physical education (PE) and sport are put to good use. Pupils have opportunities to participate in a range of sporting competitions, as well as to develop their physical and sporting skills for pleasure. Staff develop their own skills in delivering high-quality PE sessions, supported by a strong leader. Lunchtime staff access training to support active play at breaktimes. As a result, many pupils say they love PE and enjoy being active.
- The majority of parents who spoke to inspectors were very positive about the school. They feel that their children are well cared for and happy. Parents have mixed views on homework. Many appreciate the burden of homework being lifted currently, giving them more time to focus on reading. Others would like more formal homework to be set. Several parents mentioned that the changes in leadership have resulted in different policies and procedures, but they recognise that there is a greater focus now on their children's learning and progress.
- The school, and especially the new leaders, have received good support and challenge from Sandwell local authority. Local authority officers have a good understanding of the school and have provided appropriate advice and guidance. Their work with new leaders, including governors, is helping to secure further improvements in the school.

## **Governance of the school**

- Governance is effective. Following a review of governance in 2016, the board of governors was reconstituted. Changes to the organisation of meetings ensure that all governors are now well informed and kept up to date. Governors provide appropriate

support to the new headteacher and leadership team. There is a strong commitment to the shared vision that pupils deserve the best teaching and learning possible.

- Governors have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and the aspects that could be improved. Links with key senior leaders and regular visits help governors gain first-hand knowledge of the quality of the provision across the school. Recently appointed governors bring appropriate skills to the board. They have begun to challenge leaders more deeply about standards in the school.
- The governing body ensures that pupil premium funding and the primary PE and sport funding are spent effectively and make a positive difference to pupils. They check that gaps in outcomes for different pupil groups are closing so that no pupil is left behind.
- Governors play an important part in ensuring that safeguarding is effective. The named link safeguarding governors have extensive knowledge of how to keep children safe. All governors attend training to develop their skills and knowledge further. Governors ensure that they meet their statutory duties. They check that systems, such as those for the safer recruitment of staff, are followed appropriately.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- A strong safeguarding culture, which puts children first, runs through the school. Leaders and staff work closely together to ensure that vulnerable pupils and their families receive appropriate and timely support. Staff have well-established systems in place to provide early help, such as those around the school's food bank. Designated safeguarding leads are highly skilled in engaging support from external agencies when necessary. They are tenacious in following up concerns, and they help families through the referral process. There is a strong commitment from all at the school to ensure that children are cared for.
- Staff are appropriately trained in safeguarding, including in the 'Prevent' duty and how to keep pupils safe from extremism and radicalisation. Designated safeguarding leaders also attend a range of higher-level training. All staff know what to do if they are worried about a pupil. Comprehensive records, including a key chronology that makes sure actions are timely, are kept and regularly reviewed by designated safeguarding leaders. Policies and procedures take account of the most recent government guidance. Leaders, including governors, ensure that policies and procedures are followed appropriately and consistently.
- Pupils say that they feel safe at school. They understand why there are cameras and gates around school. They know who to talk to if they are worried or anxious about anything. They appreciate having worry boxes in classrooms and the chance to go to the nurture room to talk with trusted adults. Through the curriculum, pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, for example when using the internet.
- The single central record is very well maintained by a highly knowledgeable member of staff. A well-established system is in place for checking the suitability of staff to work with children. Induction procedures ensure that all new staff understand the school process for dealing with any concern about a pupil. Governors are knowledgeable about safeguarding and understand their responsibilities for keeping pupils safe.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

**Good**

- Leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching across the school. They know where it is particularly strong and highly effective and where additional support is required to ensure consistently strong practice. They provide training, mentoring and support to ensure a consistent approach across all phases of the school.
- Teachers work together to plan work which will interest and motivate pupils to do their best. They know what they want pupils to learn, based on their knowledge of what pupils can do already. Clear sequences of learning ensure that pupils develop their skills and knowledge over time. Teachers are using the school's agreed approaches to teaching increasingly consistently.
- Deeply embedded routines and effective transition from one activity to another ensure that very little learning time is lost. For example, pupils quickly settle to their work after breaktimes and focus hard on the task they have been given.
- Relationships between adults and pupils are strong. Teachers create a classroom culture that is focused on learning. Pupils are encouraged to try and 'have a go'. They work well with one another.
- Every opportunity is taken to enrich pupils' knowledge and accurate use of a wide range of vocabulary. Key words are linked with current learning and topics. Teachers demonstrate how to use the words appropriately, and they explain their meaning carefully for pupils. They check that pupils understand what new words mean, and they encourage them to look for other interesting words when they write. By Year 6, pupils use an extensive range of high-quality words in their independent writing.
- Where teaching is strongest, teachers skilfully question pupils and set tasks to meet individual needs. They adapt their teaching within lessons to address misconceptions and spot pupils who are ready to be moved on. However, not all teachers are equally skilled in this. Occasionally, some teachers ask pupils to work independently before pupils have understood the basic skills they need for the task.
- Leaders actions to improve mathematics have been effective. A new approach to teaching mathematics provided much needed coherence to the mathematics curriculum. Staff have developed greater confidence in teaching mathematics through specialist training offered by leaders. Daily sessions to develop fluency in aspects such as addition and multiplication enable pupils to secure basic mathematical skills more quickly. Teachers ensure that regular opportunities are provided for pupils to use their skills and knowledge in a range of problem-solving activities. Pupils are now able to reason and explain their answers.
- There has been a renewed emphasis on the teaching of phonics. In the early years and key stage 1, teaching builds on what pupils already know. Phonics teaching is focused and well organised. Teachers use a range of different strategies to maintain pupils' interest and to help them develop the skills needed to become independent readers. Some pupils are not challenged sufficiently, however, and this slows their progress.
- Teachers build on early reading skills effectively. Pupils read regularly and in different subjects. Key texts are linked to current topics and provide the focus for discussion and

extended writing. For example, in Year 6 pupils read a novel called 'Spilled Water' while learning about the role of women in China. Pupils who spoke to inspectors enjoy reading and were highly engaged in the work springing from this theme.

- Most teachers ensure that the skills needed to write fluently and effectively are taught well over time, and they expect pupils to use them in extended pieces of work across the curriculum. However, low expectations of handwriting, spelling and punctuation are evident in some pupils' books.
- Teaching across a wide range of curriculum subjects is typically good. In subjects such as geography, pupils build up specific subject knowledge through regular teaching. Knowledge organisers, linked to each topic, outline the key themes and associated vocabulary that pupils will learn. However, at times, the learning sequence in some foundation subjects has not been carefully thought through and pupils do not deepen their subject knowledge as quickly as they might.
- Additional staff and a range of volunteers provide effective support for pupils, both in and out of the classroom. They know the pupils well and understand their different needs. Adults challenge pupils to work independently where possible.
- Recent changes to the homework that is set give a greater focus on reading. Pupils talk enthusiastically about the books they are reading. They also say that they enjoy the open-ended homework tasks and the opportunity to be creative.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good
- Pupils are positive and enthusiastic about all that the school has to offer. They appreciate the new library and the range of reading books. They try hard with their learning and enjoy the challenges set. They are aspirational, and say that they want to be doctors, paediatricians or vets. Pupils say there is plenty to aim for, and they value their education.
- Pupils' respect for one another shines through in the things they say and do. They take care of one another and look to help anyone who may be upset. Pupils commented to the inspector that they try to encourage each other, saying, 'We don't want someone who is grumpy to become someone who is mean to others.' Pupils demonstrate a secure understanding of the feelings of others.
- Pupils have a good understanding of bullying in all its forms, including online bullying through text messaging and social media. They know that bullying is something that happens several times on purpose and is not just a one-off incident. Pupils have confidence in the adults in school to deal quickly with any incident of bullying should it occur.
- Pupils who met with inspectors believe deeply that this is a tolerant and respectful school, where everyone is welcomed 'no matter what your age, colour or ability'. Older pupils talk confidently about treating people equally. The school values, such as honesty, freedom, peace, resilience and forgiveness, provide a monthly focus, and pupils are encouraged to spot these traits in each other.

- Pupils are given opportunities to take a lead and to develop a full range of skills and talents. Digital leaders, playground leaders and sports council representatives take their responsibilities seriously. They are proud of being chosen, and they use their expertise to help others.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are polite and courteous towards adults and each other. They hold doors open and use their manners appropriately. They conduct themselves sensibly in school and line up quickly at the end of breaktimes. Pupils ensure that visitors to the school are welcomed and new pupils feel included. Standards of behaviour around the school are good.
- Behaviour in classrooms is very good. Pupils concentrate hard and apply themselves enthusiastically to their learning. They cooperate well when working in pairs or small groups. Classrooms are calm and focused on learning.
- Playtimes and lunchtimes are happy, sociable occasions. Pupils sit and chat together. They welcome the opportunity to spend time with their friends. Appropriate supervision ensures that any issue is dealt with quickly. A very wet lunchtime during the inspection resulted in pupils being loud and more boisterous inside. However, pupils themselves recognised that this was due to a lack of opportunity to go outside and 'let off steam'. The majority of pupils are able to manage their own behaviour very well.
- Adults ensure that the behaviour policy is applied consistently, and pupils understand what is expected. Pupils say that 'reflection' and 'parallel reflection' time provide them with time to think when things go wrong. Appropriate support, through the recently established nurture provision, helps pupils with specific behavioural needs. Adults work skilfully with pupils to help them develop a better understanding of what is expected. Pupils are encouraged and supported to take responsibility for their own behaviour.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school. Attendance has improved and the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has been reduced. The number of pupils who are late to school is also reducing. Leaders work closely with parents to ensure that their children attend regularly and get to school on time.

### Outcomes for pupils

### Requires improvement

- In the past, the school's focus has been on pupils' attainment, with insufficient attention given to whether pupils were making the progress that they should. As a result, pupils' progress has been too slow for a number of years. This is no longer the case. Leaders have established accurate starting points for all pupils, and they regularly check the progress pupils make in reading, writing and mathematics. Current pupils are making much more progress than they have done in the past.
- From 2016 to 2018 in the key stage 1 assessments, Year 2 pupils' attainment was in line with or similar to national averages in reading, writing and mathematics.
- In 2017 and 2018, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1 was below national averages. However, improvements in the teaching of phonics is helping current pupils make better progress. Pupils, particularly in Years 1 and 2, use their knowledge of letters and the



sounds they make when reading independently.

- At the end of key stage 2, attainment has been below the national averages in reading, writing and mathematics for the last three years. As a result of higher expectations from new leaders and improvements in the quality of teaching, rates of progress for current key stage 2 pupils have increased. Work in pupils' books and the school's checks on learning show that pupils are now making much better progress in many subjects. Leaders work closely with Year 6 teachers to promote high expectations and provide additional support for pupils, many of whom have gaps in their learning from previous weaknesses in teaching. The work of current Year 6 pupils and recent teacher assessments show clear improvements this year.
- In reading, some pupils make strong progress, particularly in comprehension, while others make limited progress due to lack of reading practice and a mismatch of reading books to ability. New reading resources have been purchased and all staff are working effectively to raise the profile of reading.
- Over the last three years, progress in mathematics across key stage 2 has declined. However, this decline has now been halted and the workbooks of current pupils show that they are making much stronger progress. This is a result of a new approach to the teaching of mathematics and of many more opportunities to use and apply their skills and knowledge.
- Progress in writing is also improving well. Pupils are given many opportunities to write in different subjects across the curriculum. Teachers support pupils effectively to develop their vocabulary and sentence structure.
- Pupils' knowledge and skills are developed well in other subjects. For example, in geography pupils learn to identify physical features in aerial photographs, while others explore where different types of food come from. Progress is strongest where the teaching meets the needs of pupils most effectively.
- Not enough pupils achieve higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2. New leaders are working with staff to develop higher expectations and greater challenge. While these aspects are improving quickly, leaders acknowledge that there is more to be done to secure higher standards, particularly for the most able pupils.
- Over time, disadvantaged pupils have made less progress than other pupils nationally with the same starting points. As a result, few reached the expected standards at the end of key stage 2. Now, their progress is improving and differences in attainment compared to other pupils are diminishing in most year groups in school.
- Leaders carefully track pupils' progress and quickly identify those who are in danger of being left behind. Timely, focused support helps these pupils make better progress, and many are now catching up with their peers. Pupils with SEND make secure progress because tasks are adapted to meet their particular needs, and they receive appropriate support in class, individually and in groups.

### Early years provision

**Good**

- The majority of children join the school with skills and knowledge that are below those typically expected for their age. Children settle quickly and make good progress during

their time in the Nursery and Reception classes. The proportion of children who reach a good level of development has risen over the last three years and is now similar to that found nationally. Children are well prepared for Year 1.

- Provision across the early years has been further developed as a result of involvement in a project run through a local teaching school. Regular training opportunities and the chance to learn from the best practice locally are valued by leaders. Supported by a lead teacher, the staff team have made significant changes to the learning environment and the curriculum on offer. Staff are working hard to embed the changes and ensure that they are sustainable.
- Many children have communication, speech and language difficulties when they start school. Leaders ensure that specialist speech and language staff are available to support the early years staff in developing children's skills quickly. Adults develop children's vocabulary and ability to talk confidently. There is a clear focus on developing children's communication skills across the early years.
- Children make a positive start in the nursery. Routines are well established and adults encourage children to be independent. Children choose their own resources and know how to tidy away. They play well together, sharing and taking turns. Children are curious and enjoy exploring all that the nursery has to offer.
- Phonics is taught systematically across the early years. Adults make learning letters and sounds fun and use a practical approach. Children listen carefully to the sounds and begin to use their knowledge when writing independently. However, the teaching of phonics is not yet consistently strong across all groups. Not all adults model the sounds accurately or check children's work thoroughly. This slows the progress that children make.
- Adult-led activities are carefully planned and appropriately sequenced, building on what children know and can do already. Some adults are skilled in asking questions which further develop children's understanding. For example, in Nursery, children were encouraged to prove how many different ways they could make three, using counters, cubes and other objects. Other adults ask simple questions which do not help children think for themselves. Where there are high expectations and appropriate challenge, children make strong progress.
- Leadership of the early years is developing strongly. A new leader was appointed in September 2018. She works closely with the headteacher to check and evaluate the work of the early years team. Areas for development are identified and feed into the school improvement plan. For example, the leader knows that there is more to be done to develop learning in the outdoor area. She ensures that this is a key focus in the development plan and takes action to ensure that activities outside interest and challenge children in their learning. Leaders work to engage all staff in a shared vision to improve the early years further.
- Behaviour is good in the early years. Children play and learn well together. They share resources and use equipment appropriately. They develop the ability to listen to each other. Children understand what is expected of them. Relationships with adults and between children are positive.
- Children who are disadvantaged and those children with SEND are appropriately supported. As a result, they make strong progress from their different starting points.

- Partnerships with parents are strong. Regular opportunities are provided for parents to be involved in their child's learning journey. Workshops encourage parents to understand the key skills that their children are developing. Play and stay sessions, such as the recent bugs and insect session, provide a chance for children and parents to learn together. Parents are confident that their children are happy and enjoying school.
- Safeguarding in the early years is effective. Children learn to take risks in a safe environment. For example, when washing up at the sink, children know to get a safety step so that they can reach more easily. All appropriate welfare standards are met. Adults are vigilant, and they ensure that children are well cared for.

## School details

Unique reference number	103946
Local authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	10086926

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	466
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Co-chairs	Brian Edwards and Jo Turner
Headteacher	Sarah Garratt
Telephone number	0121 559 1037
Website	<a href="http://www.highfields.sandwell.sch.uk">www.highfields.sandwell.sch.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:highfields.enquiry@highfields.sandwell.sch.uk">highfields.enquiry@highfields.sandwell.sch.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	11 to 12 December 2014

## Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is similar to that found nationally.
- There are fewer pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds than national levels, and fewer pupils speak English as an additional language when compared nationally.
- There are more pupils with SEND than are found in most primary schools. However, the number of pupils with an education, health and care plan is lower than that found nationally.
- Since the last inspection, a new headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher have been appointed. They were all previously staff at the school.
- The chair of the board of governors role is shared between two governors.

- The school is part of an early years project through a teaching school and is supported by Sandwell local authority.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher, and with subject leaders. The lead inspector spoke with one governor and met with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors made visits to classrooms on both days of the inspection. Most of these visits were with school leaders.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide selection of pupils' books from across the curriculum. Most of the work scrutiny was completed with school leaders.
- Pupils were spoken to formally and informally. A group of pupils met with an inspector. Inspectors heard pupils read. They observed behaviour in classrooms, in corridors, in the dining hall and outside on the playgrounds.
- Inspectors also spoke to parents at the start of the school day. The lead inspector considered the 62 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.
- The lead inspector considered the 32 responses to the staff questionnaire and the 40 responses to the pupils' survey.
- Various school documents were scrutinised, including the school's self-evaluation, school improvement plans and records of monitoring. Minutes of governors' meetings and information about pupils' progress, behaviour, attendance and safety were also analysed and discussed with leaders.
- Documents relating to safeguarding were checked and inspectors looked at published information on the school's website.

## Inspection team

Nicola Harwood, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Susan Morris-King

Her Majesty's Inspector

Lindsay Nash

Ofsted Inspector

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