

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



2 April 2019

Mrs Emma Davies
Headteacher
Sparhawk Infant School & Nursery
Sparhawk Avenue
Sprowston
Norwich
Norfolk
NR7 8BU

Dear Mrs Davies

Short inspection of Sparhawk Infant School & Nursery

Following my visit to the school on 20 March 2019, 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 December 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Since the previous inspection, you have become headteacher and overseen various changes to the school leadership team. Staffing is very stable and you have created a highly close-knit team. Staff are extremely positive about the school, with all those who responded to the online survey stating that they are proud to work there. Staff are clear that they are well supported by colleagues. All share your high expectations of what can be achieved.

Parents and carers are generally just as positive about the school. Comments such as 'Sparhawk is a little gem in the Sprowston community' are typical of the responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online survey. Parents are highly involved in their children's education, with daily sessions for sharing books and talking to staff, plus a wide range of informative coffee mornings with high attendance.

You and your leadership team have not been satisfied to rest on your laurels with a good school and have striven to look for further improvements. Leaders have looked at the specific skills that a 'Sparhawk child' comes in with on entry and what they

need to achieve by the time they leave, including going beyond the national curriculum, with the '50 Sparhawk Experiences'. You have revised your approach to teaching and learning, resulting in pupils making very strong progress in their time in the school.

Pupils want to work hard and do well. They are highly engaged with the new thematic curriculum and talk excitedly about the topics they have studied. Several told me that they 'love English' and writing stories. Children in the early years often choose to do independent writing, for example stories about their own experiences in and out of school. Pupils listen carefully to each other in discussion and give their opinions on how their peers could improve their work. All are extremely well behaved. Teachers are currently trialling ways to further enhance pupils' curiosity and thirst for learning.

Lunchtime was a joy to watch. Pupils enjoyed playing in a wide range of activities. They engage their creative side, producing plays and drawing. There are opportunities to develop their physical skills and take controlled risks, building balancing courses out of tyres and planks or climbing up large tree trunks. A group of boys were seen to be very carefully constructing a bug hotel to care for insects. Pupils also engage in role play on the large boat and find opportunities to be quiet in the tunnels. Staff were positively engaging with the pupils, encouraging them to create art with chalk and develop racket skills in games of short tennis.

Safeguarding is effective.

Staff are kept well informed about changes to safeguarding guidance and risks that pupils may face by both a high-quality staff newsletter and regular meetings. Any concerns that staff have about pupils are dealt with quickly and effectively by school leaders. Governors have ensured that appropriate checks are made on adults regularly in the school and that records are kept up to date.

Pupils are very confident that they are safe in school. All parents who responded to the survey agreed with this. Pupils are clear about who they could talk to if they had a problem and know how to keep themselves safe.

Inspection findings

- We agreed lines of enquiry at the start of the inspection to check whether the school was still good and if there was evidence that there has been significant improvement in certain areas. First, we looked at what leaders and teachers are doing to ensure that pupils' writing is as strong as their reading, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. This was because, at key stage 1 in 2018, although above the national average, the proportion of pupils at the expected standard in writing was below that of reading.
- You and other leaders were aware that your curriculum was successful but knew that it could be even better. You have retained the skills progression but introduced a 'thematic curriculum' where the entire school focuses on one topic, launched by a whole-school experience, such as a visit to Norwich Castle. This

approach is highly engaging for pupils and the quality of writing across the school for all pupil groups has shown rapid improvement during this school year. Different ages encounter different levels of vocabulary, ensuring that there is appropriate challenge. Pupils are beginning to use these words in their stories and recounts.

- Across the school, it is clear that pupils are not held back if they find learning harder, but are well supported by adults and by resources such as 'sound buttons' and word banks to access the same learning as others. You say that 'We lift the child rather than lower the bar', which is evident across the school.
- We looked at how the wider curriculum enhances boys' progress in developing vocabulary. This was because there has been a gap between girls' and boys' reading attainment at the end of key stage 1. There is a high emphasis on understanding subject-specific language in areas such as science. Staff have had training to enhance their own subject knowledge, which has improved the quality of learning.
- Pupils have been extremely engaged this academic year by links being made to the wider theme where appropriate, such as investigating air resistance by making catapults. This has engaged the boys but also the girls. Both boys and girls have a strong understanding of the new vocabulary they are given. They are asked to write reasons for ideas about why things happen and are beginning to use the stronger vocabulary in these explanations.
- I also looked at how the early years curriculum was providing opportunities for children to develop early skills in writing, particularly for boys. This was because fewer boys than girls achieved a good level of development by the end of Reception in 2018 because of their writing skills. Developing children's use of large equipment and small tools is clearly mapped out to encourage skills in how to hold a pencil correctly and start writing.
- In Nursery, it is clear that some pupils have poorly developed speech and language on entry and there is a high emphasis on talking and adults modelling clear speech. Children play games and have many resources to develop their physical skills in catching and climbing. They use playdough and tools such as scissors to build their pencil control. Teachers directly teach skills such as downward and anti-clockwise pencil strokes in group drawing sessions.
- In Reception, children are taught phonics rapidly. They are then able to successfully use this in their writing. They write in specific sessions, but also choose to write during role play, in the writing rooms and when using 'writing tool bags' outside. Those with poorer skills at the start of the year, mainly boys, had specific additional 'funky fingers' work to enhance pencil grip and practice in writing early words. It is clear that these children are now making rapid progress. Several have moved from only beginning to write to writing several sentences at a time with interesting words.
- Since the previous inspection, you and your governors have given attendance a permanent high profile. The attendance of pupils at key stage 1 is above the national average, but when younger children are included it is not as strong. You maintain a daily close eye on pupils who are at risk of poor attendance. Families

are given support when needed and also praise when attendance has increased. As a result, persistent absenteeism has significantly declined in the last few years.

- At the previous inspection, leaders' and governors' understanding of the long-term plan's effectiveness was noted as a next step. The current school combined self-evaluation and development plan is of extremely high quality. It is clear on progress since the previous inspection and what proposed initiatives will look like if successful. Governors use this well to measure effectiveness.
- The governors are self-reflective and have moved from having committees to all governors taking a key area of responsibility. They are clear about the strengths and next steps of their area. Governors undertake 'deep dives' where they look in detail together at aspects of the school's performance and also become more familiar with daily practice. They are very clear on what staff need to do to even further enhance their practice and they challenge school leaders on this.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils apply further the subject-specific vocabulary being taught across contexts and in explaining reasons for their answers.

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

Yours sincerely

Tessa Holledge
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders. I met with a group of governors and a group consisting of the majority of the staff. I spoke to the local authority representative and a range of parents. I visited all the classes several times, mostly with you or one of the assistant headteachers. At lunchtime, I observed the pupils at play.

Together with senior leaders, I looked at a wide range of pupils' workbooks. I spoke to a group of Year 2 pupils. I also took account of the pupil, parent and staff surveys.

I examined the school's safeguarding records and the single central record of employment checks.