

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Carley Holliman
Executive Headteacher
Mount Stewart Infant School
Carlisle Gardens
Mount Stewart Avenue
Kenton
Harrow
HA3 0JX

Dear Mrs Holliman

Short inspection of Mount Stewart Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 8 May 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 July 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Since your appointment as executive headteacher in September 2017, you have developed an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. You have strengthened the leadership team and made significant changes in the school to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

The school's strong values foster pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils behave very well and relationships between adults and pupils are based on mutual respect. You set high expectations and challenges for everyone involved with Mount Stewart Infant School, as summed up by the school's motto 'Learn – Inspire – Achieve'.

Parents, carers, staff and pupils are positive about the school. The school gives priority to helping parents support their children's learning. The school provides workshops for parents to develop their understanding of early literacy and mathematical skills. Home learning gives parents the chance to take part in further learning activities and creative projects with their children.

All of the areas identified for improvement in the previous inspection report have been addressed. Regular assessment and oversight of pupils' progress ensure that school improvement is focused where it is most needed. Pupils now have good

opportunities to apply mathematics skills in other subjects, particularly science. Work is continuing to increase the challenge presented to the most able pupils in mathematics lessons.

Governors are well informed and provide you with a good balance of challenge and support. They are confident in your educational leadership and strategic vision for the school. Governors make regular planned visits, including visits to classrooms. They also discuss curriculum developments and standards with teachers, parents and school leaders.

Outcomes for pupils are strong, with attainment that is above average by the end of key stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics. This represents good progress, particularly in writing. However, in 2018, a below-average proportion of pupils reached the expected standard in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1. This and other specific aspects of the school's work were my lines of enquiry for this inspection.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are well maintained and of good quality. The pre-employment checks on the suitability of adults to work with children meet statutory requirements. Governors regularly check the school's single central record and undertake safeguarding audits around the school. Leaders make sure that training for staff and governors is up to date. Staff are kept aware of local safeguarding issues. They know how to raise any concerns they may have about a pupil's welfare.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe and to whom they should report any concerns. Pupils and parents say that bullying is rare and swiftly dealt with. Parents report that their children are safe, happy and well looked after in school. The responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, show that the vast majority of parents support this view. One parent's comment, typical of others, described the school as a 'caring and cohesive community'.

Inspection findings

- For the first line of enquiry, we agreed to look at how pupils are learning and applying their skills in phonics. In 2018, there was a significant dip in the outcomes for Year 1 pupils in the national phonics screening check.
- Leaders have introduced a systematic approach to the teaching of phonics across the school, supported by staff training. This starts with exposure to sounds and letters for three-year-olds in the Nursery Year. By the time they leave the Reception Year, many children now have the decoding skills to read and write simple, age-appropriate words and sentences. However, phonics lessons in the Reception Year take place in the afternoon after playtime and this results in some children not being fully focused on the specifics of phonics learning.
- In key stage 1, teachers and pupils clearly enjoy the teaching of phonics.

Teachers model precise phonics sounds and use grammatical and technical language accurately. This enables all groups of pupils to make good progress in learning to read. The pupils I heard read in Year 2 were skilled in using phonics to read and decode words that they did not understand. Reading records are used to maintain strong communication between school and home. Regular and accurate tracking of individual pupils ensures that leaders are quick to identify and support any pupils who are at risk of falling behind.

- The second line of enquiry was to look at how the most able pupils are being supported to achieve the higher standards in mathematics at the end of key stage 1. In 2018, the proportion of pupils achieving the higher standards in mathematics was below the national average.
- Leaders have high expectations of pupils' work. The school has introduced new learning resources for mathematics and provided training for all staff. Leaders have put in place challenging strategies targeted at the most able pupils. These include extension activities in lessons, more problem-solving and wider opportunities to apply practical mathematical skills in other subjects. Pupils' work and visits to classrooms show some evidence of the impact of this work on most-able pupils' progress but this is not yet consistent in all classes.
- Finally, we looked at the wider curriculum in the school, including science. This was to establish whether provision in other subjects is as strong as in English and mathematics.
- A scrutiny of pupils' work showed high standards in science in the school. Coverage of science topics is extensive and pupils in Year 2 spoke about how much they enjoyed their learning in science. Pupils undertake a wide range of investigations and experiments in science that are appropriate to their age. It was also notable that pupils are able to apply their mathematical skills to science. The review of pupils' work shows that they are making good progress in science.
- Pupils achieve well in physical education and music, which are taught by subject specialists. In art and design, pupils' sketchbooks show that they receive plentiful opportunities to develop their techniques in drawing, painting and understanding of colour. Displays in the art room show a wide range of materials, such as textiles and clay, being used in art and design.
- Pupils' 'learning journals' contain their work in history, geography and religious education (RE). The planned work in these subjects is based around a 'big question'. Scrutiny of pupils' work shows a lack of coherence and, in discussion, they are unsure of what they have learned. In particular, there are few opportunities provided for pupils to develop an early knowledge and understanding of history and geography or to work in sufficient depth. In RE, pupils' progress is stronger in learning about different faiths and the values of tolerance and kindness. School leaders recognise the challenge in providing a coherent age-appropriate humanities curriculum.
- Pupils' experience of the wider curriculum is enriched by additional activities, including educational visits, opportunities for outdoor learning and school assemblies.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- mathematics skills are further developed so that more pupils attain the higher standards in mathematics at the end of key stage 1
- the curriculum is reviewed to provide more opportunities for pupils to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding in the humanities.

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

Yours sincerely

Sean Flood
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held discussions with you and other senior and middle leaders. I spoke with a representative from the local authority and held a meeting with the chair of governors. I spoke with pupils informally in class and around the school and met with a group of Year 2 pupils. I observed pupils' behaviour in class, in the playground and as they moved around the school. I scrutinised pupils' work in a wide range of subjects. I heard pupils read and spoke with pupils about the books they read. I also visited the Nursery. I made visits to all classes, alongside senior leaders. I examined the school's progress information and assessment records. I scrutinised a wide range of documentation related to safeguarding, welfare and attendance. I looked at behaviour and bullying incident logs. I considered the responses of 93 parents to Parent View and the 56 responses of staff to Ofsted's online survey.