

GEMS Didcot Primary Academy

Chestnut Drive, Great Western Park, Didcot, Oxfordshire OX11 6DP

Inspection dates

18–19 June 2019

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Early years provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The headteacher, ably supported by senior leaders, is unwavering in her determination to provide the very best possible school experience for every pupil.
- Governance is clearly structured, well informed and highly effective. Trust representatives and school leaders work as a cohesive team, using their considerable skills to drive the school forward.
- The depth and quality of leadership, at all levels, is excellent. Middle and subject leaders are an effective team. Staff are supported and trained well. Their morale is high.
- The curriculum inspires staff and pupils because it is vibrant and thoughtfully planned. Pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding are developed exceptionally well across a range of carefully interconnected curriculum areas.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education runs seamlessly as a unifying thread through all aspects of school life. All members of the school community understand and aspire to model the school's motto: 'be kind, be brilliant'. As a result, the school is a harmonious, high-achieving environment, which reflects fundamental British values.
- Teachers and teaching assistants know pupils well. Teachers use this understanding and their strong subject knowledge to plan activities that are expertly matched to pupils' abilities in all subjects. Teachers' and teaching assistants' use of questioning is highly effective.
- Pupils are happy, motivated and excited to learn. They demonstrate excellent attitudes, and enthusiastically rise to the high expectations set for them.
- Children get off to a great start in early years because of the outstanding leadership and provision. Children settle happily into school, thrive, and are well prepared for Year 1.
- Across the school, current pupils, including those with special educational needs and or disabilities (SEND), and disadvantaged pupils, are making very good progress from their starting points to attain well across the curriculum. Nevertheless, leaders rightly aspire to ensuring that more disadvantaged pupils attain at higher standards.
- Parents are highly supportive of the school. All those who completed the Ofsted survey, Parent View, would recommend the school. Parents and school leaders are keen to explore ways of further developing their effective partnerships.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Enhance and develop provision for disadvantaged pupils so that more attain at the highest levels across the curriculum.
- Consider ways to include parents further as partners in their children's learning.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Since the school opened in 2016 the headteacher and her team have united staff, parents and pupils in creating a school which exemplifies its motto: be kind, be brilliant. The headteacher ensures that this vision underpins each action and decision. As a result, expectations are uncompromisingly high in every aspect. Staff and pupils have risen to this challenge with energy and enthusiasm.
- Leaders have a deep and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and needs. They are wisely planning ahead and already making plans to support smooth growth in provision up to Year 6. This careful forethought and strategic thinking ensures that everyone has what they need, and confidence in leaders is rightly high.
- Leaders' clear commitment to professional development means that there is a growing pool of skilled leaders. Senior and middle leaders are highly effective in their role and make a significant contribution to the high quality of the curriculum and teaching. Subject leaders are skilled, knowledgeable and ambitious.
- Staff have the utmost regard for the support that leaders offer and feel that their opinions and thoughts are valued. All of the staff spoken to and those who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire are proud to work at the school. This was explained by a member of staff, who said: 'Being here has reignited my passion for teaching.'
- The curriculum is inspiring and interesting. It provides pupils with a solid and secure grounding for their next steps as it builds knowledge, skill, competence and the ambition to try new and exciting things. Opportunities abound to play instruments, try out sports and investigate topics which fascinate pupils, such as the effects of plastic pollution or the importance of bees. Pupils are encouraged to display and share their work, through, for instance, taking part in regular concerts or by choosing a special piece to display in their individual frames which adorn the walls.
- Leaders place great importance on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Carefully planned lessons promote a respect for diversity that empowers pupils in proudly sharing their cultures and heritage. During the inspection pupils in key stage 2 taught a song they had written promoting caring, sharing and kindness to the younger pupils. Pupils demonstrate a mature understanding of fundamental British values and an informed understanding of the wider world.
- The school is highly inclusive. The provision for pupils with SEND is strong. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) is highly effective. She knows the pupils extremely well. Working with parents, carers and external agencies, she designs bespoke interventions to support pupils to develop their skills and confidence in all aspects of school life.
- The additional sports premium funding is used well. The leader of physical education (PE) and sports demonstrates the highest ambition for all pupils. He is determined that alongside taking part in a wide range of activities pupils are involved in setting the exciting and wide curriculum and extra-curricular offer.
- The leader responsible for the achievement of disadvantaged pupils is aspirational for these pupils and drives provision effectively. She monitors pupils' progress carefully

and has a thorough understanding of individual needs. This knowledge drives provision and allocation of funds well. Rightly, she aspires to even greater achievement for disadvantaged pupils so that they can increasingly attain at the highest standards across the curriculum.

- Parents are overwhelmingly positive. One comment typical of those received was: 'My children get excited about going to school every day... Our family is proud and feel very lucky to be part of this wonderful school.' Some parents are keen to develop their association even further, for instance by considering with leaders how to facilitate the involvement of working parents in celebrating their children's many achievements.

Governance of the school

- Governance is highly effective. There is a clear vision for pupils which is driven by high aspirations of achievement for all. Lines of management within the trust have been clearly defined to ensure that everyone benefits from effective professional support and accountability measures. This is underpinned by effective reporting systems and committee structures. There is absolute clarity as to who is accountable for what and how success is defined.
- Trustees have a precise and accurate understanding of the quality of education that pupils receive and of the outcomes they achieve. This is wisely supplemented by some objective external reports, for example in respect of safeguarding. Leaders appreciate the support and challenge provided by the considerable expertise from within trust.
- Trustees, together with members of the local advisory board, work as a cohesive team. Members visit the school frequently to monitor the school's plans for improvement and to see, at first hand, the impact of leaders' actions. They have regular involvement with leaders, staff and pupils so that they have a comprehensive understanding of the school's strengths and needs.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Pupils' welfare is at the heart of the school. All parents and staff who spoke to inspectors or completed the surveys felt that pupils were safe at school.
- Pupils said that they felt safe. They expressed absolute confidence in staff to look after their welfare. They demonstrated a good understanding of accident procedures and told inspectors about the regular fire drills and secure school site, which help them to feel safe and protected. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe online and how to use the internet responsibly. This is because e-safety forms an integral part of the school's curriculum.
- Leaders ensure that all staff fully understand their roles and responsibilities in keeping pupils safe. Training for staff is frequent and regularly revised. Consequently, staff are vigilant and confident in how to report any concerns they may have. Leaders follow up concerns swiftly and with tenacity, ensuring that pupils receive the support they need.
- Record-keeping is careful and detailed. This supports leaders well in their monitoring

and decisions as to when to take action. All necessary checks take place on appointment and are recorded meticulously on the school's single central record.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teachers and all staff have consistently high expectations of what every pupil can achieve. They confidently state that there are, 'no limits here'. Staff are determined and assured that every pupil will do well and make excellent progress. They have a 'can do' or 'how can we do?' approach with no excuses, only a quest for solutions when pupils have individual barriers or challenges to their learning.
- Well-chosen training has had an extensive and unifying impact in enabling staff to provide consistent teaching and expectations for pupils. Staff regularly debate and reflect on how they teach to ensure that it is of the highest quality. As a result, pupils know what is expected of them and are enabled to make very strong progress.
- Teachers' planning is closely matched to pupils' abilities, interests and starting points. Assessment information is gathered regularly and within lessons so that pupils' needs are picked up quickly, allowing the right support provided at the right time. As a result, pupils experience success and display positive attitudes to learning.
- Teaching assistants are integrated and invaluable members of the team. Their contributions both in class and when used for interventions successfully support pupils with additional needs and enable them to secure their next steps with increasing confidence.
- All staff create a highly positive environment where the use of derogatory language is rare. The value of diversity and inclusion is seamlessly woven into the curriculum and has had a strong impact on pupils' values and beliefs about difference and inclusion.
- English teaching is typified by a focus on ambitious vocabulary, which supports pupils extremely well in their reading and writing. Pupils relish the challenge this provides and enthusiastically absorb new words and their meanings. For example, a Year 4 pupil offered the adjective 'ugglesome' to describe the goblin in an English lesson and was proud to have 'stumped' the teacher with a new word.
- Younger pupils are taught phonics effectively and learn to read quickly. Across all classes, teachers routinely introduce pupils to high-quality texts to support their learning. Consequently, pupils demonstrate a thirst for reading.
- The teaching of mathematics builds effectively on pupils' prior knowledge to help them to develop their mathematical reasoning. For instance, during a lesson about angles pupils were encouraged to apply their knowledge of shape and skills in estimation, which supported their learning well.
- Teachers ensure that the wider curriculum offer is exceptional and rich. This motivates and grips all pupils to succeed and engage. For instance, during the inspection pupils were enthusiastically conducting an experiment to find the best material for a mouse to make a nest. They successfully took temperatures of containers of water insulated with a range of materials. Other pupils were engaged in violin sessions or PE lessons throwing javelins. In addition, pupils value the wide range of trips, and visitors, which are carefully chosen to enhance the curriculum further.

- Pupils with SEND are well supported and included because staff know them well and consider their needs carefully. Provision is regularly reviewed by the staff, pupils, parents and outside agencies to ensure that additional input is highly effective. Parents are fully supportive of this process and keen to be even more involved in further shaping provision.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils are deeply proud of their school. They love coming to school because they feel safe, valued and inspired to learn. Pupils are highly articulate and discuss their learning with great enthusiasm, saying that they especially enjoy the challenging work. Pupils struggle to identify favourite areas of learning because they enjoy it all, but a pupil did identify English particularly because, 'It's where you get to share your imagination and emotions.'
- Pupils are well informed about a wide range of different faiths and religions and can compare and contrast them. They demonstrate a strong sense of the importance of treating people equally and with respect. For instance, they know that sexist and racist behaviour is totally unacceptable and say they would report people for doing this.
- Pupils have a very good understanding of bullying, although they say that it rarely happens. School records support this. Pupils know that unkind behaviour of any sort is not tolerated. They try very hard to uphold the school's motto of being kind and brilliant.
- Pupils have outstanding attitudes to learning. They value the education they receive and are aspirational for the future. They are resilient and enthusiastic learners who are secure in the support of both adults and their peers.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils' conduct and behaviour are exemplary. Pupils are polite, courteous and well mannered. They move around the school sensibly and greet visitors warmly, contributing to the school's happy, inclusive atmosphere.
- During lessons pupils are engaged and enthusiastic but are careful to listen attentively, both to adults and to each other. They build thoughtfully on each other's suggestions. Pupils demonstrate maturity and respect for the rules. During an exciting science session in Year 1, a pupil gently reminded her peers, 'We have to sit on chairs.'
- The high attendance of pupils endorses their enjoyment of school. Few are persistently absent, and no groups are disadvantaged by poor attendance. Leaders monitor school attendance closely and provide tailored individual support for the few pupils for whom regular school attendance is challenging.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Pupils attain highly and make strong progress across the curriculum. The school's current progress information, along with inspection evidence, shows strong and sustained progress across all year groups in all subjects. As a result, pupils' outcomes are outstanding.
- In each year group the work in pupils' books is of extremely high quality. Pupils' work shows consistently well-developed knowledge, skills and understanding in a wide range of areas. Pupils' development is supported successfully by the logically sequenced series of lessons in each subject.
- Phonics teaching is highly effective and supports pupils to make excellent progress in using their phonics skills for reading and spelling. As a result, pupils read aloud with understanding and confidence in whole-class reading activities.
- Pupils demonstrate a love for reading. The well-stocked library and carefully chosen class books that supplement each learning topic mean that pupils can immerse themselves in stories and find information that deepens their understanding and fires their imagination.
- Outcomes in pupils' writing books demonstrate strong progress from often high starting points across the school. Writing is typified by confident phraseology and rich vocabulary. Older pupils demonstrate an understanding of different styles of writing for different genres. Attention to detail is high, and secure grammatical sentence construction is evident.
- Pupils' outcomes in mathematics are supported by early identification of any gaps in their knowledge. These are quickly filled. As a result, pupils' work demonstrates a mastery of basic skills and concepts, which they apply to solving increasingly complex problems with confidence and flair.
- Pupils demonstrate secure skills across the curriculum. For instance, pupils are confident scientists who are well practised in predicting, experimenting and applying mathematics to review data and draw conclusions. Pupils demonstrate secure acquisition of key skills and vocabulary over time. This supports their learning across the curriculum successfully and ensures that they attain well.
- The most able pupils achieve well. Work in the books of current pupils shows that teachers challenge them to achieve their potential. For example, in the wider curriculum, the most able are encouraged to deepen their understanding of topics.
- Throughout the school, disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND make strong progress from their starting points. This is because highly effective teaching and carefully targeted support ensure that their needs are met. Nevertheless, leaders are determined that more disadvantaged pupils attain at the very highest standards. The additional pupil premium funding is carefully targeted to ensure that it supports these pupils well across the curriculum and is laying down secure foundations for achieving this ambition.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- The early years leader has a deep understanding of how young children learn, and shares the ambition of other leaders that every child should achieve success. She is

persistent and consistent in these aspirations, and this supports staff well in meeting her high expectations. Training for staff is carefully selected to meet their needs and further develop the high-quality practice.

- Staff in early years ensure that their planning is carefully matched to the interests, experience and needs of the children. For instance, as a response to a shared story, children in the Nursery looked at a map of Africa and learned an African song. The adult linked this to a child's trip to Ghana. She supported children in learning the song by likening it to 'heads, shoulders, knees and toes', which they had previously sung.
- Leaders monitor children's progress carefully, and adapt provision skilfully where needed. Pupils with SEND, and disadvantaged pupils, benefit from tailored and effective support. This helps them to benefit from the well-thought-out curriculum and make very good progress from their starting points.
- Safeguarding is of high priority, risks are assessed and responded to well so that children are supported to play safely and learn to manage risks. Known routines establish important necessities such as regular handwashing.
- Outcomes are strong. Children enter the early years with skills that are broadly typical for their age, although there are some additional needs in areas of communication. They make good progress from their starting points so that they are very well prepared for Year 1, both in the skills they demonstrate and in their attitudes to learning.
- Early reading, writing and number skills are developed very successfully. Materials for reading and writing are highly stimulating and enjoyed by children. During the inspection children enjoyed a discussion about 'Ned the dog'. They showed empathy and concern that he had been injured and needed the vet. Opportunities to develop early writing abound, for instance through filling in 'boarding cards' before playing at boarding a plane.
- Parents are involved in their children's learning through contributing home-based 'wow' moments. Their attendance at the wide range of workshops and information sessions is high. Leaders aspire to include parents even more through encouraging contributions to the online system of recording to capture children's learning and celebrate their achievements at home and school.

School details

Unique reference number	140688
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10088096

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	277
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Harry Ziman
Principal	Alison Ashcroft
Telephone number	01235 606 013
Website	www.gemsdidcotprimary.org
Email address	office@gemsdidcotprimary.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school opened on a purpose-built site in 2016. It continues to grow by taking on a new Reception cohort each year. This means the school will expand to include Year 6 pupils by 2021. Currently the school caters for pupils up to Year 4.
- The school is part of Gems Learning Trust.
- The proportion of pupils who are entitled to the pupil premium is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is also above average.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was the first inspection since the school opened in 2016.
- The inspectors, accompanied by senior leaders, visited lessons across the school. Pupils' behaviour was observed around the school, including during assembly and breaktimes.
- The inspectors looked at pupils' work in lessons and checked a selection of pupils' books with subject leaders.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, governors and staff.
- The lead inspector met with, and had a telephone conversation with, representatives from the trust.
- Inspectors met formally with groups of pupils and spoke informally to other pupils during lessons and around the school. A number of pupils read to an inspector.
- A wide range of documentation was considered, including: the school's self-evaluation; improvement plans; minutes of the governing body's meetings; information on pupils' progress and attainment; and records of pupils' behaviour and attendance. Inspectors scrutinised records relating to safeguarding.
- The inspectors took account of parents' views through 57 responses to the Ofsted survey, Parent View, including 40 free-text comments. Inspectors also considered 25 responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Deborah Gordon, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Catherine Davies	Ofsted Inspector
Matthew Newberry	Her Majesty's Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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