

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Jenny Hunt
Headteacher
Hazelmere Junior School
Hawthorn Avenue
Colchester
CO4 3JP

Dear Mrs Hunt

Short inspection of Hazelmere Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 20 October 2015 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 November 2011.

This school continues to be good.

There are lots of distinctive things about Hazelmere Junior that make it a lovely school. The pupils spoke to me with great enthusiasm about their music, drama, art and other enrichment activities, and experiencing the thrills and spills of outdoor activities, including going sailing. Recently, dozens of different bicycles were brought into school so that children could have fun having a go on the many different contraptions. 'Having a go' is central to your philosophy: your staff really encourage pupils to do their best and try new things, so they develop self-confidence in their own ability.

Pupil well-being is at the very heart of your work, and this has helped to establish a friendly and supportive school community where pupils get on very well together. However, the main reason that the school remains 'good' is because, despite a dip in results in 2014, pupils make good progress and achieve well.

Pupils say there is no bullying of any kind at the school because of the good system to manage bad behaviour. They also report that very occasionally there is 'a bit of joking around and silly name-calling', but this is dealt with immediately. The prefects support good behaviour at lunch and breaktimes. They say you act quickly to sort out any issues that arise. Pupils like the 'quiet room' where they can spend time with you if needed. They say it works for most pupils but some may need a different approach and that poor behaviour from one pupil should not affect the good record of the rest of the class.

You have successfully reduced fixed-term exclusions last year. However, the new Year 3 pupils are taking longer to settle in and there are a few who need additional support and different approaches to help them behave well. You have recognised the need for external support and are seeking guidance from the local authority.

Most parents and carers speak with great affection about the school. A new parent from a different part of the country is very pleased with how quickly her child has settled in and how well teachers are supporting his special educational needs. Another parent talked about the extra mile the school was prepared to go to make sure their child's special needs were catered for. A few Year 3 parents expressed concern about communication. These concerns were reflected in a few of the 13 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. They say they don't get enough information soon enough about how their child has settled in or is getting on. You have already taken this on board and are reviewing the weekly newsletter sent out by class teachers so that it is more informative for them. You and senior leaders are liaising with the feeder infant school to make the move from Year 2 into Year 3 as smooth as possible for pupils and their parents and carers.

You and your staff have addressed the issues from the last inspection and taken rapid action to address the drop in standards in 2014. Your information about pupils' achievement for 2015 shows that you have been successful and that most pupils are now doing a lot better. You have also taken strong action to improve attendance and reduce absence of pupils who find it difficult to attend school regularly. As a result attendance is currently in line with national figures. You recognise that there is still more to do and have the right systems in place to make this happen. Although the school is well led and managed, your vision for school improvement is not underpinned well enough because planning is not sharp enough.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and the governors make sure that pupils are safe at school. All safeguarding arrangements are suitable and meet current requirements. There are excellent systems in place to record incidents effectively; records are sufficiently detailed and of high quality. Staff training is fully up to date and they know what to do if there are any concerns about a pupil. You are working effectively with social services and giving good support to several families where a child is deemed to be 'in need'.

The school website contains all the required information. Policies are updated annually and you make sure staff read and understand them. You know your community exceptionally well and care deeply about the families who send their children to the school.

Inspection findings

In the last 12 months you, your staff and governors have turned around the decline in pupil outcomes in 2014. The local authority review of the school in January 2015 was 'a massive wake-up call' because it highlighted how the school's work needed to be focused more sharply.

In the light of the review you and your deputy headteacher took time to think much more strategically about the school's development, and devised a new action plan. Your staff have put this plan into effect with great success. You have closed the achievement gap between disadvantaged pupils, other pupils in the school and all pupils nationally, as a result of new reading and writing programmes. You have trained staff effectively to deliver these programmes and this has resulted in much improved results for reading and writing. However, mathematics has not been as successful. You have taken immediate action to improve teachers' subject knowledge for the new curriculum. You have also checked every pupil's basic knowledge of mathematics concepts and skills. Pupils who have gaps in their knowledge, skills or understanding are being supported with one-to-one tuition. After only six weeks, this is making a huge difference to pupils' confidence and speed with basic skills in adding, subtracting and multiplying numbers.

Your decision to use some of the school's pupil premium allocation (additional government funding to support disadvantaged pupils) to appoint a teacher as pupil premium champion has been highly successful. This teacher has started to create individual profiles for all these pupils which specify each pupil's strengths and anything that is holding back their learning. After six weeks she has retrained the support assistants and set up programmes which are already improving pupils' basic skills, especially in being able to express their ideas clearly in their writing. She has also created opportunities to extend the learning of the most-able disadvantaged pupils, in order to close the gap with all pupils nationally in writing.

The governing body has been restructured following the local authority review. The new Chair of the Governing Body has made sure that committees are working effectively with the school and that all governors are well trained to carry out their roles. Governors have made it a priority to get to know the school and make regular visits. They have a wide range of expertise and are using this to good effect to support and challenge you and senior leaders.

You and senior leaders have a good understanding of how to drive improvement. You have established stringent systems for monitoring teachers' performance. Pupil progress meetings are held every half term where teachers are required to explain how they are making sure all pupils make good progress from their starting points. However, your action plans lack the sharp focus and rigour of what you do in practice. Targets are unclear, do not have precise time limits and are not measurable. Although you have successfully improved pupils' progress you have not addressed the poor presentation of the work in their books. Handwriting is not neat and joined even in Year 6 and pupils do not use a ruler well to draw straight lines or set out maths calculations carefully.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- strategic plans for school improvement have sharp targets that are measurable and have precise time limits
- pupils' handwriting and presentation in their books is neat and careful in all subjects.

Yours sincerely

Julie Winyard

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection meetings were held with you and the deputy headteacher, staff, governors, and a representative from the local authority. In addition, subject leaders for English and mathematics, the pupil premium champion, parents, a group of pupils and the school council were also interviewed. A wide range of documentation, including information about pupil outcomes, was scrutinised. All teachers were observed teaching writing and mathematics. Pupils' books were scrutinised in lessons and a sample was looked at in more detail with subject leaders.