

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Ms Debra Mansfield
Millbrook Combined School
Mill End Road
High Wycombe
Buckinghamshire
HP12 4BA

Dear Ms Mansfield

Short inspection of Millbrook Combined School

Following my visit to the school on 19 January 2017, 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 March 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You acknowledge that you and your leaders have taken the school on a journey of recovery after pupils' outcomes dropped in 2015. Although they improved a little in 2016, they did not pick up as much as was anticipated, especially in writing. However, at the start of this academic year, you wisely implemented further, extensive improvements, which have led to better progress across the board, including in writing. Your accurate assessment information indicates that pupils are now achieving higher in this subject because of the changes brought about in teaching. In addition, there have been similar improvements in other subjects as middle leaders become more adept at enabling staff to teach effectively. Teaching is now improving consistently across the school.

You have established a culture in which pupils value their learning, enjoy coming to school and want to do well. You and the governors have instilled very high ambitions in the staff, with high expectations of pupils. Pupils are well behaved. They are polite, well-mannered and welcoming to visitors. For example, they were very happy to speak with me about their work and how the teachers provide helpful guidance when they make mistakes. They chatted confidently about how they are helped to improve their work when I met some of them. One pupil commented that when she arrived at the school, she felt very 'welcomed into the Millbrook Family'. This indicates that the school provides good support for pupils because the staff know each pupil individually.

You have introduced a new system for assessing pupils' achievement, which you have recently refined, following sharp and insightful evaluation by leaders. Your assessments show that current pupils are making stronger progress than pupils previously. This is particularly the case in writing. Individuals identified as needing more help to keep up with the others, or who have particular gaps in their knowledge, benefit from good alternative support.

You ensure that assessment is accurate by asking senior leaders to sample and check teachers' work. You also provide time for staff from different year groups to compare and contrast the reliability of judgements about the quality of pupils' work.

Leaders have ensured that reading skills are taught well across the school, including in the early years. Lower-attaining pupils acquire reading skills through regular opportunities to read with an adult. You have a consistent approach to teaching pupils phonics. This was apparent when I heard pupils successfully apply reading techniques such as sounding out unfamiliar words. For the last three years, pupils' results in the phonics screening check in Year 1 have been in line with national expectations. Over the same period, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils reaching the required standard has risen, and is now significantly higher than in 2014. The number of disadvantaged children in the early years reaching a good level of development has also increased over the last three years.

You and the governing body have worked effectively to ensure that the school is well placed to respond positively to changes in the needs of the school community. Governors understand the school's strengths and weaknesses in great detail. Governors monitor how effectively leaders have tackled the priorities identified at the last inspection. At the last inspection, inspectors recognised the many strengths of the school. They also identified the need to ensure that lessons engage all pupils and for teachers to provide work that is consistently matched to pupils' different starting points. While they judged behaviour to be good overall, they noted that not all teachers managed the behaviour of the most challenging pupils effectively enough. Inspectors also said there was a need for leaders to monitor rigorously pupils' progress and ensure that any interventions were well targeted. Leaders have addressed these areas so that:

- lessons engage pupils well and tasks provide pupils with good levels of challenge
- staff manage behaviour well because they have a good understanding of pupils' needs, and their relationships with them are very positive
- you, your deputy headteacher and governors closely check the impact of teaching on pupils' achievement, especially that of disadvantaged pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders, including the governing body, take safeguarding responsibilities very seriously, ensuring that required procedures and checks are continuous and thorough. All staff and governors undertake regular and effective training to ensure that they are up to date in their knowledge and understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities. Good links with outside agencies are used to help keep pupils healthy and safe and to enable teachers to develop pupils' knowledge so that they

have a clear understanding of how to live a healthy life. Your records of engagement with these agencies are detailed and show your careful approach when making referrals. Leaders with safeguarding responsibilities, well supported by other staff, provide good assistance for vulnerable pupils. Staff follow up vigilantly on referrals, supporting families where they can, and chasing up pupils with low attendance.

Pupils feel safe and well looked after in school, one parent commenting that their child is 'growing and thriving'. Pupils know who to turn to if they are worried about anything. They are confident that the adults in the school will listen to their concerns. Leaders have ensured that personal development programmes include themes of how to form good relationships and how to deal with conflict. The school's personal development programme promotes pupils' understanding of how to keep safe. As a result, pupils feel well supported at school and trust their teachers and other adults. Pupils consequently know how to keep themselves safe and are able to talk confidently about possible risks and dangers. Leaders have created rigorous procedures for monitoring pupils' attendance. Staff take appropriate action if pupils miss school.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on the key lines of enquiry agreed at our first meeting. These included how well children in the early years learn, the work you are doing to improve reading and writing skills for different groups of pupils, especially at key stage 1, and how effectively leaders monitor progress and standards. Another line of enquiry was focused on how you promote good behaviour and regular attendance.
- Children in the early years learn well. They make good progress because the curriculum is well planned. Phonics is taught effectively and applied in the tasks children undertake. Consequently, a higher proportion of children are set to reach a good level of development by the end of this academic year. The outside area is carefully used to add to the rich experiences on offer inside the classrooms. Disadvantaged children are making faster progress than before and, as a result, more are reaching a good level of development.
- Pupils make good progress in writing. Teachers quickly identify pupils who need to make rapid progress to reach age-related expectations, putting together a cohesive package of support for individuals and different groups of pupils.
- In key stage 1, the school has successfully addressed the causes of previously weaker attainment levels. Staff ensure that pupils have a good grasp of how to structure their writing clearly, and use grammar and punctuation with increasing precision. Consequently, standards have risen and are continuing to improve further. Pupils' writing skills in key stage 1 are also improving strongly because tasks challenge pupils, and motivate and interest them.
- Significant changes and improvements in the school's approach to the teaching of writing have resulted in faster progress. This has included the use of discussion and talk to help pupils generate adventurous ideas. Pupils use words and sentences efficiently to create and convey vivid pictures to the reader.

- Pupils are provided with frequent and clear feedback, both during lessons and about the work that they have tackled, in line with the school's marking policy.
- School leaders, including governors, ensure that the monitoring of pupils' achievement is regular and given a high priority. The school provides effective additional support for pupils at risk of not doing as well as they should, and they are working well as a result. Self-evaluation is accurate; however, middle leaders' checks are not always sharply enough focused on whether the newer approaches are enabling pupils to work at greater depths of understanding.
- The school's work to promote good behaviour, positive attitudes and a culture of safety has been successful. As a result, pupils display positive attitudes in a wide range of subjects, show resilience when tasks are difficult, and feel safe. As one pupil said when asked if they feel safe in school, the answer was, '100%'.
- During the previous academic year, attendance was low and persistent absence was high. The school has tackled these issues robustly and has worked very well to support families to attend frequently. This has ensured that attendance is now broadly average and shows signs of rising further as the academic year continues.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- middle leaders' checks are sharply focused on the effectiveness of opportunities provided for pupils to apply their skills at greater depth, especially in writing
- middle leaders monitor more closely the quality of teaching and achievement of pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Richard Blackmore
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I initially met with you and then held meetings with the designated leader for safeguarding and teachers with responsibility for subjects and year groups. I met with representatives of the governing body. I made a series of visits to lessons, and observed pupils' behaviour around the school at the start of the day, at breaktimes and during lessons. I also spoke with parents at the end of the day and met with a

representative from the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust. I spoke with a group of pupils about their experience of school.

I looked at pupils' work during lessons and scrutinised a sample of their work. I looked at the views of 18 parents who gave their opinion of the school through Ofsted's free-text comment opportunity. I took account of the 25 parental responses on Parent View and other information about parents' views collected through surveys carried out by the school.

I examined a range of documents, including safeguarding records and policies, behaviour policies, the school's improvement plan and self-evaluation summary, and minutes of the governing body's meetings. I also looked at the latest achievement information for the school, and information relating to pupils' attendance and behaviour.