

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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Sharon Smith  
Headteacher  
Hempstead Junior School  
Birch Grove  
Gillingham  
Kent  
ME7 3HJ

Dear Mrs Smith

### **No formal designation monitoring inspection of Hempstead Junior School**

Following my visit with Elizabeth Bowes, Ofsted inspector, to your school on 20 January 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about aspects of the effectiveness of leadership and management in the school, including governance.

### **Evidence**

Inspectors met with you and other staff, including teachers, the special educational needs coordinator, deputy headteacher and business manager. Inspectors met with governors, including one of the two Chairs of the Governing Body, and held a conference call with representatives of the local authority. A meeting was held with a group of pupils, and inspectors analysed the school's recent pupil survey. The views of parents were considered through discussions in the playground with some parents collecting their children from school. There were too few responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, for these to be considered. Inspectors considered 43 confidential responses to Ofsted's staff survey. They examined a range of documents, including the school's improvement plan, and information about pupils' achievement, staff development, teachers' performance management and leaders' evaluations of teaching. Inspectors observed teaching and looked at pupils' work in their books. Pupils were observed in the playground and moving around the school. Inspectors scrutinised the single central record of checks on adults working with pupils and other documents relating to safeguarding, child protection arrangements, logs of behaviour incidents and records of attendance and exclusions.

## **Context**

Hempstead Junior School is larger than the average-sized primary school, with 348 pupils on roll. The proportions of pupils from ethnic minority groups and of those who speak English as an additional language are below average. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is well below the national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs receiving school support is above the national average, and the proportion with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is broadly average. Most pupils join Hempstead in Year 3 and remain at the school throughout their junior education. Of the 22 teachers currently employed at the school, nine have joined the staff since September 2014.

## **Main findings**

In all the classrooms, inspectors saw pupils listening attentively and working hard. A positive ethos pervades the school, creating a settled and positive environment in which pupils make good progress. Adults work well together during lessons, setting high expectations for pupils' progress, to which pupils respond well. Effective teamwork between staff supports the progress and well-being of all groups of pupils, including those needing support to learn or to maintain their concentration and effort. Teachers and teaching assistants are consistently professional in their demeanour and communication with one another and with pupils. Pupils told inspectors that changes in teaching staff have not interrupted their learning and this is confirmed by the work seen in pupils' books and information about pupils' achievement. Pupils enjoy school and feel safe, and they rightly judge that staff care well for them in lessons and at social times. Staff work together diligently to ensure a well-organised school environment with interesting and motivating displays, promoting pupils' learning well.

The headteacher ensures staff roles and responsibilities are clear. Management structures such as the senior and middle leadership teams support leaders at all levels to carry out their responsibilities effectively. Cycles of regular meetings ensure that pupils' progress and the continuing improvement of the school are routinely reviewed and discussed by leaders and staff. Staff training is linked well to the school's priorities for improvement and responds appropriately to the ambitions of individual teachers. Currently, eight teachers are coming to the end of an externally provided leadership development programme. Inspectors observed consistently effective teamwork by staff during lessons and high levels of staff effort and morale. However, the headteacher does not have the full confidence of all members of staff. Some told inspectors that they do not always feel well informed about changes to policies and procedures and consider that their views are not always taken into account.

The headteacher ensures that staff are well trained, including in safeguarding. With the exception of references to child sexual exploitation, the school's safeguarding policies are effective and clear. This includes procedures for the management of any allegations against staff, and for whistle-blowing. Pupils' good behaviour is promoted well by the way all staff implement the school's clear behaviour policy consistently. Pupils are motivated by the possibility of earning house points for their effort and good attitudes. Marble jars in classrooms show pupils how well they are doing in rising to the high standards of behaviour expected. Staff are quick to recognise pupils' good effort and helpfulness, motivating pupils to maintain positive attitudes. High expectations for pupils' considerate behaviour extend into their whole life at school, and inspectors saw pupils behaving very well when moving around the school and in the playground. Where necessary, leaders and staff support individual pupils well to improve their behaviour and sustain this change. As a result, fixed-term exclusions at the school have reduced to zero, having previously reached a level well above the national average.

During the autumn term, the work of the governing body ground to a halt as a result of serious, mutual difficulties in communication between governors and the headteacher. Some staff expressed the view to inspectors that governors have not ensured that they know the school and its staff well enough. Since January, largely as a result of strong challenge from the local authority, governance procedures and lines of communication have started to be restored. Governors have firm plans for a series of visits to the school and meetings with staff in the coming weeks. Governors and the headteacher state that they are committed to move forward quickly this term so that the governing body fulfils its responsibilities securely, with a sound understanding of pupils' progress, the quality of teaching and the life of the school.

Inspectors found that parents have mixed views about the school. Most of the parents inspectors spoke with were confident about the teaching their children receive and their children's progress. However, a number felt uncertain due to views expressed by other parents in the playground and on social media. Some parents are concerned that their views are not considered well enough by the school.

### **External support**

The local authority's recent action, to warn the school that issues in leadership including governance must be urgently resolved, has galvanised the school's leadership. As a result, governors and the headteacher have taken urgent steps to catch up with missed governors' meetings, including to monitor the school's finances. The local authority's governor service is providing intensive support, including the attachment of a national lead governor as expert consultant to the Chairs of the Governing Body. The local authority currently classifies the school as 'causing concern', a category which entitles the school to raised levels of support and challenge from consultants and senior advisers. As a result, the local authority knows the school's progress and remaining challenges well, and is well placed to advise and intervene further, if required.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Fully restore, as a matter of priority, effective governing body operations, including good communication and confidence and trust between governors and the headteacher.
- Redouble efforts to ensure the widespread trust and confidence of staff and parents in the school's leadership, including governance.
- Ensure that the school's safeguarding policies include reference to protecting pupils from child sexual exploitation.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Medway, the Secretary of State for Education and the Chairs of the Governing Body. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Siân Thornton  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**