

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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Mr Jeremy Harrison
Hillside Community First School
Hillside Road
Verwood
Dorset
BH31 7HE

Dear Mr Harrison

Short inspection of Hillside Community First School

Following my visit to the school on 17 March 2016, 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 January 2011.

This school continues to be good.

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

You provide strong and purposeful leadership and are highly ambitious for the school. You continually strive to improve all aspects of the school's work and have driven improvement rapidly since becoming headteacher. Governors and staff share your vision and determination to provide the very best education for every child. As a result, the pupils arrive full of enthusiasm in the morning, ready to learn, anticipating another exciting day with their friends.

You and your governors have an accurate and in-depth understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. No time has been wasted in tackling the improvements identified both by yourself and the previous inspection. With an absolute focus on improving pupils' personal development, you ensure that pupils make good progress academically. You check pupils' progress each term and analyse the work in their books with your leadership team. As a result, you know precisely how much progress pupils are making and quickly identify those in danger of falling behind and put in place appropriately targeted support programmes. This approach is helping to ensure that pupils transfer to their next school with particularly strong skills in reading and writing.

Your drive to improve the teaching of mathematics, identified at the previous inspection, is resulting in current pupils making faster progress than previously was the case. Teachers have taken on board the challenges of delivering the new

mathematics curriculum. They plan lessons which deepen pupils' learning and their understanding of number. Pupils confidently tackle the harder work and have risen to the challenge of the increased demands. Work in pupils' books confirms that teachers have significantly raised their expectations of what pupils can achieve. However, you and your staff are never complacent and recognise that there is further work to do to ensure that all gaps in pupils' mathematical understanding are closed.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your governors are rigorous in implementing the school's agreed safeguarding policies and procedures. There is a strong culture in the school of keeping pupils safe and secure. All staff receive the training they need to be able to recognise and act on signs of risk or possible harm. The strong relationships you have built with outside agencies are effectively supporting your work with the most vulnerable pupils. You follow up concerns assiduously and provide strong support to families when appropriate. Pupils feel safe and very well looked after. The recent e-safety awareness week has equipped pupils well to keep themselves safe when using the internet. Parents are glowing in their praise for the work you do with their children.

Governors are diligent in checking pupils are safe. They ensure that all staff are appropriately checked before taking up their appointment. They have received the training they need to undertake their roles effectively. This includes training for staff on the government's 'Prevent' duty. Consequently, staff know how to protect pupils from the risk of exposure to extremist views and opinions.

All leaders have ensured safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that detailed and high-quality records are maintained.

Inspection findings

- Since taking up your appointment in September 2014, you have taken decisive action to strengthen the impact of the school's work. You are never complacent and, together with your staff and governors, you continually seek to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to ensure the already high standards continue to rise. You have focused rigorously on the achievement and learning of disadvantaged pupils. You identified that this group of pupils in Year 2 did not achieve well enough in the end-of-year tests in 2015. As a result, you have made sure that they are given the highest priority. Staff check and record their learning each week and immediately identify any pupil at risk of falling behind. Swift, well-targeted support is planned and implemented to help them catch up. The school's records confirm that most of these pupils are now making similar progress to their peers. However, although the most able, disadvantaged pupils are now making much faster progress than in the previous year, you are determined to speed progress even further, particularly in writing, to ensure they achieve their full potential. The school's monitoring records confirm that leaders routinely check the

learning and progress of pupils. However, visits to lessons and checks on the quality of teaching do not focus sharply enough on the achievement of groups, including the disadvantaged pupils. As a result, teachers do not receive the specific guidance they need to improve these pupils' learning even further.

- You have focused strongly on improving the quality of teaching across the school. You and your governors are adamant that the pupils deserve only the best teaching. On-going training is supporting teachers to develop their practice even further. You have ensured that all teachers are held to account for the progress of their pupils. They work together effectively to plan challenging and interesting lessons that engage and motivate pupils to learn. High-quality questioning is now evident. Teachers use focused questions well to probe and deepen pupils' learning further. On occasion, some lessons lack sufficient challenge to ensure that pupils, and particularly the most able, make good progress. However, frequent monitoring of teaching and on-going feedback from yourself and other leaders, including your school effectiveness partner, is supporting continued improvement.
- The school's agreed approach to providing feedback to pupils is now established. Pupils say teachers' comments help them know how to improve their work. Nonetheless, this approach is not yet being consistently applied across all classes. This is slowing progress for some pupils.
- Leaders have strengthened the focus given to the teaching of letters and sounds (phonics). This work begins in the early years and helps children to develop a strong foundation on which to build their reading and writing skills. Teaching assistants lead group work with confidence, as a result of their good subject knowledge. Children quickly acquire the phonics knowledge they need to learn to read and write increasingly complex words. The school's records confirm a higher proportion than previously are doing well and are on track to reach a good level of development by the end of this academic year.
- Middle leaders demonstrate a passion and drive to improve the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects. Following the previous inspection, these leaders formed strong links with three other schools, creating the Verwood Learning Partnership. This work is resulting in an exciting collaboration between the different parties as they work together to develop teachers' skills in moderating pupils' work accurately. Other training opportunities are providing teachers with useful time to work together to develop their knowledge and understanding of the mathematics curriculum. This approach is supporting teachers to deliver high-quality lessons which systematically build pupils' understanding and reasoning in number. Historically, the school's results in mathematics have been weaker than in English. However, this gap is now closing and standards in mathematics are rising.

- The English subject leader has implemented strategies to improve the teaching of spelling, grammar and punctuation. The impact of this work is evident in pupils' writing. For example, Year 1 pupils re-told the story of 'The three little pigs', using full sentences and correct punctuation. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 successfully completed high-quality explanation texts on their chosen topics, such as the digestive system. Pupils are learning to write fluently and independently in a range of genres.
- Governors are highly ambitious for the school. They have a very clear understanding of the school's strengths. They are proactive at finding out for themselves where improvements still need to be made. For example, they have an in-depth understanding of the achievement of disadvantaged and the most-able pupils. However, they recognise that they need to develop their ability to check the learning and progress of these pupils. They bring a wide range of skills and expertise to the governing body. This enables them to ask challenging questions and support leaders to make the improvements needed. Nonetheless, the targets set out in the school's action plans are not precise enough to enable governors, and also leaders, to check the school's performance systematically and robustly. Further details stating what is to be achieved with precise timescales are currently missing from the plans.
- Parents are exceptionally supportive of the school, as evidenced by the high number of positive responses to the online questionnaire and parent free text. Comments such as, 'my child has flourished' and, 'I feel involved in my child's education. This is a brilliant school,' were typical. Parents particularly appreciate the high-quality support that the special educational needs teacher provides and cite the very positive impact of this support and intervention on their children's learning. This is a highly inclusive and friendly school where every child is valued and supported to achieve well. Parents spoke glowingly about the work of the parent teacher association in bringing the whole school community together at their events. This is strengthening the links between home and school even further.
- The school has focused relentlessly on improving attendance since the previous inspection. No holidays are authorised and class certificates are awarded for high attendance. These factors, taken together with the engaging and exciting curriculum, are improving pupils' attendance, which is now in line with the national average. However, leaders are determined to improve this figure even further.
- The school provides a wealth of opportunities to develop pupils' social, cultural, moral and spiritual development. Pupils are taught to be responsible citizens and to demonstrate respect and tolerance of others. For example, during the inspection pupils spoke about their link school in Gambia with great maturity. The 'Hillside School Charter' supports them effectively to understand their right to feel safe, to be respected and to learn and enjoy their time at the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school's action plans include measurable success criteria that can be used to evaluate the progress and impact of each action being taken
- lessons are appropriately challenging to ensure that all pupils make good progress
- observations of teaching focus sharply on the progress of different groups, particularly the disadvantaged and the most-able pupils
- they monitor and evaluate the implementation of the school's marking policy to ensure that teachers' feedback helps pupils to improve their work.

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

Yours sincerely

Catherine Leahy
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, school leaders, the chair of the governing body and other governors. I also met parents at the start of the school day. I also met with the school effectiveness partner and a representative from the local authority. I spoke with pupils during lessons and at lunchtime and scrutinised the quality of their work. I took account of 40 responses to the staff questionnaire and 89 parental responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also noted the 86 responses to the Parent View free text service. In addition, I looked at a wide range of evidence relating to safeguarding, the quality of teaching and assessment information. I also scrutinised the school's analysis of its attendance and behaviour records.