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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Peter Wain
Headteacher
Portfields Primary School
Westbury Lane
Newport Pagnell
Buckinghamshire
MK16 8PS

Dear Mr Wain

Short inspection of Portfields Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 31 October 2017 with Louise Eaton, Ofsted Inspector, 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 May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since becoming headteacher, you have carefully evaluated the school's work and have overcome turbulence in staffing by appointing well. You have successfully shared your aspirations for the school. You have high expectations of staff and give support where necessary. Staff work hard and are determined that all pupils feel valued and achieve as well as they can.

You and your newly formed senior leadership team are highly skilled and have a good understanding of how the school could be further improved. The school improvement plan addresses this comprehensively and your decisive action has been successful in bringing about improvement already. For example, outcomes in early years and key stage 1 improved last year and staff more effectively meet the individual needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Parents are supportive of the school and are keen to attend organised events such as parents' evenings and assemblies. They recognise there have been many changes in the past two years and the majority are very positive about these and are happy with the care and education their children receive. Particular strengths mentioned to inspectors were the smooth induction for children starting school and the effective support for those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Parents feel that teachers are approachable and friendly and they appreciate that most issues are dealt with swiftly. However, some parents feel that communication could be more timely and would welcome greater access to the

senior leaders.

Pupils are excited and articulate when talking about their school, especially the new curriculum. Year 6 pupils were keen to describe their recent 'wow' day which involved dissecting a heart which was, 'gruesome but really interesting'. Pupils enjoy having visitors to the school and taking part in educational trips. They can explain clearly how these activities support their learning and develop their independence. The new behaviour system is clearly understood by pupils and they like the rewards, including 'star of the week', and think the consequences are fair. Pupils speak with pride about the responsibilities they are given. These include being members of the school council and sports captains. They are enthusiastic about the school's sporting achievements and the opportunities they get to perform in productions.

Around the school, pupils conduct themselves well and are kind and respectful to each other and adults. In classrooms, pupils concentrate and work hard. They are keen to talk about their learning and are proud of their achievements and progress. Pupils in different classes were eager to explain their learning in mathematics and show inspectors their best writing. Pupils achieve well but occasionally tasks do not challenge them, particularly in mathematics, and some of the most able pupils report that work is sometimes too easy. Middle leaders are knowledgeable and are developing the skills to effectively monitor the work of colleagues. However, they do not yet consistently challenge others to secure improvement.

The chair of the governing body is passionate about the school and has great understanding and knowledge of all aspects of the school's work. The chair and the governing body support you effectively through their careful monitoring and focused challenge. Governors are ambitious for the pupils and can identify where there have been weaknesses in pupils' progress and attainment. They have a clear understanding of the recent changes the leadership team has put in place and have welcomed this decisive action to improve teaching, learning and assessment throughout the school. Governors recognise that they need to further develop their skills to enable them to more closely monitor the impact of recent changes and hold all leaders fully to account.

At the time of the previous inspection, leaders were asked to check the quality of teaching more frequently and pupils' progress more systematically. The leadership team has overhauled the assessment process and has developed a school-wide analytical approach to all assessment information. This ensures that all teaching staff are developing a greater understanding of pupils' current attainment and are able to identify what pupils need to learn next. Pupil progress meetings, aspirational targets and a well-structured programme of professional development have led to teachers' higher expectations. This has been particularly successful in early years and key stage 1, and progress is increasing in key stage 2.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders make sure that all safeguarding processes are fit for purpose and up to date. A well-managed training programme ensures that all staff, governors and volunteers follow the latest safeguarding guidance. Administrative staff complete and clearly record all the appropriate employment checks on new staff and these are scrutinised regularly by senior leaders and governors.

The designated safeguarding leader works closely with other agencies to ensure that pupils are safe and families are supported in an appropriate and sensitive manner. Comprehensive records are kept of this work. You give dedicated time during meetings to raise staff's awareness of vulnerable pupils. This leads to a consistent approach in addressing pupils' specific needs. Leaders work hard to ensure that all parents are included positively in their children's education. The overwhelming majority of parents who participated in the parent survey agreed that their children were safe at Portfields Primary School.

Attendance is good for most pupils. This is because effective processes ensure that pupils' absence is investigated thoroughly and lateness is recorded and followed up. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe in school, at home and online. Pupils said that they enjoy school, feel safe and are encouraged by staff to look after their own health and well-being.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, we looked closely at specific aspects of the school's provision: how the early years curriculum supports the development of boys and girls; all pupils' achievement in mathematics and writing; how well leaders' actions have improved the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes; and the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.
- The early years leader is highly effective. Clear routines and high expectations result in children exploring the environment and participating in learning effectively. There is a stimulating wealth of resources that support children's independent learning, and children of all abilities select activities with confidence and enthusiasm. Staff challenge and support children through questioning, and respond appropriately to their needs. Assessment in the early years is thorough. The leader takes care to ensure that findings are used well to plan future activities and set up appropriate learning areas.
- Children make a good start in developing their reading skills. Phonics teaching is precise and children are supported by all adults modelling the sounds clearly. A range of engaging activities encourage children to develop their phonic skills independently and they consequently make good progress.
- Leaders have made positive changes to the teaching of writing across the school and this has led to more rapid progress. In key stage 2, examples of extended writing showed how pupils have systematically developed their writing skills, knowledge and stamina. Sentence structure and punctuation are improving for most pupils and the most able pupils are confidently including adventurous vocabulary. Workbooks reflect the care and thought that pupils put into their

writing, and they are rightly proud of the work they produce. The English leader recognises that there is a need to further develop writing across a range of curriculum subjects.

- The recently appointed inclusion leader works closely with senior leaders and has a firm understanding of the latest requirements. She works effectively with parents and other agencies to provide the support pupils need. The introduction of a 'nurture area' has been received very positively. Both parents and pupils identify that it helps pupils to feel safe, secure and valued at school. The use of pupil premium funding is well targeted and carefully documented. Disadvantaged pupils of all ages and abilities achieve similarly to their classmates and other pupils nationally in all subjects.
- In all classes, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. Staff, including learning support assistants, have a detailed knowledge of pupils' specific needs. This enables them to provide pupils with focused, effective support in the classroom and on the playground, and encourages their independence. In many classes, activities challenge pupils while also allowing them to experience success. You and your staff monitor carefully the progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and refine support appropriately to accelerate their rates of progress.
- The appointment of a new mathematics leader has led to a focused approach to addressing the needs of pupils in mathematics. The mathematics leader has worked closely with senior leaders and received appropriate professional support to put in place strategies to improve the progress of all pupils. The school's assessment information shows that progress and attainment are increasing in some year groups but there is a need for greater consistency across the school.
- In 2016, too few pupils in Year 2 met the expected standard for their age in mathematics. The school's leaders took swift action. The appointment of a new leader of key stage 1 has supported teachers in addressing the needs of their pupils more fully. Results for 2017 show that attainment in key stage 1 is now in line with the national average and there are more pupils achieving a greater depth of knowledge. Those pupils who began Year 3 with gaps in their knowledge have been given additional support to help them catch up. However, in some lessons we saw that the needs of all pupils are not being consistently met. For example, some of the most able pupils were not challenged to think deeply about their learning and some pupils had targets that were too difficult.
- You have actively engaged the local authority to support the development of the school's provision. This has been very successful and has contributed to the improvement in outcomes in early years, key stage 1 and better provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Senior leaders have shown that they can make accurate judgements of the quality of teaching and learning. A well-structured programme of professional development is in place for all staff, with bespoke training positively impacting on the improvement of their subject knowledge and skills. The innovative school-based leadership programme, led by the deputy head, is beginning to develop middle leaders.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the capacity of middle leaders is further developed so they hold others to account, and ensure the recent developments in teaching are quickly and consistently embedded in all classes
- all pupils, particularly the most able, are challenged through being provided with regular opportunities to think deeply and apply their writing and mathematical skills.

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

Yours sincerely

Tracy Good
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, leaders with significant responsibilities and the chair of the governing body. I met with the school's improvement partner from the local authority. I took account of 114 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including free-text comments, and the views of parents at the start of the day. I took account of responses to a paper version of the staff survey. We spoke to a small group of pupils formally as well as talking to pupils in lessons. We observed learning in 15 classes, jointly with the headteacher and the deputy headteachers. We scrutinised pupils' work with the English and mathematics leaders. We analysed a range of the school's documentation about pupils' achievement, the school development plan, and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. I discussed with you and one of your deputy headteachers your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness.