

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)



28 August 2018

Mrs Lizzie Girling  
Executive Headteacher  
Maidstone Infant School  
Maidstone Road  
Felixstowe  
Suffolk  
IP11 9EG

Dear Mrs Girling

### **Short inspection of Maidstone Infant School**

Following my visit to the school on 10 July 2018, 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 2014.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. There have been significant changes in leadership within the school over the last four years. The new appointments of a head of school and phase leaders are supporting you as executive headteacher for the two schools within the federation. You work effectively as a team to promote the school's ethos: 'enjoy, achieve, thrive'.

Following a decline in attainment at the end of key stage 1 in 2017, leaders are addressing the identified priorities effectively. The school development plan, which includes plans for each age group, is reviewed and modified regularly.

At the last inspection, you were tasked with planning more demanding activities for the most able pupils. Pupils' achievements, particularly in reading and mathematics, are improving across the school for current pupils, including the most able.

The school is a happy, nurturing and inclusive place to be. A special feature is the support centre which provides for pupils who have complex needs. Pupils who attend the centre are integrated fully into the life of the school. They play alongside their classmates and are an important part of the school community.

Governors provide support and challenge to school leaders and ensure that planned actions are followed through. They describe how leaders and governors work well together by listening to each other's views and opinions. Governors

have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They have a particularly strong understanding of the school's work to promote safeguarding and its use of additional funding, such as the pupil premium.

Although only a few parents responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, they were positive about the school. Governors, parents and carers recognise how well staff care about the children at Maidstone Infants and how hard they work to build a community for the benefit of all. One parent described how, 'The staff's passion for teaching shines through. My child looks forward to every day because it's a brilliant place to be.'

You recognise that developing pupils' writing skills continues to be a priority. Too often pupils' writing is poorly presented and handwriting is untidy. Pupils struggle to write longer pieces of work because they are given too few opportunities to write at length. The older pupils are not in the habit of spotting and correcting their own mistakes.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You ensure that the school is a safe environment for everyone and that pupils' needs always come first. The safety and well-being of pupils is a priority for staff, who receive appropriate induction and ongoing training. They are given up-to-date advice so that they understand how to protect pupils. Staff know how to recognise and report any signs that a pupil may be at risk. School records are detailed and of a high quality. The pastoral support manager follows up any concerns and works closely with outside agencies, as necessary. She ensures that referrals are made in a timely fashion so that children and families are provided with the support that they need.

Systems for the safer recruitment of staff are robust. Pre-employment checks are carried out in accordance with current requirements and these checks are recorded fully in the single central record, which you regularly check with governors. This ensures that adults employed within the school are suitable to work with pupils.

Pupils say that they feel safe at school. They trust that staff will look after them and deal with any worries they may have. Pupils summed this up by saying, 'Children share and look after each other.'

### **Inspection findings**

- In 2017, there was a significant decline in the attainment of pupils at the end of key stage 1, to below the national average. Leaders have been proactive in addressing this as a key priority. For example, reading activities linked to stories, and reading lessons linked to topic themes, have been introduced. Pupils now enjoy reading much more and are reading more regularly at home as a result. Teachers use questioning more effectively to help pupils to make inferences from texts. They encourage pupils to repeat phrases from stories

they enjoy. As a result, pupils are developing better understanding of the texts they read.

- During the past year, there has been an increased focus on teaching spelling skills explicitly. Leaders have introduced a systematic approach to teaching common, 'tricky' words. Pupils' spelling has improved as a result of these actions. Although spelling has improved, pupils do not routinely apply their learning when they are writing. They are not provided with the resources they need to help them spell words correctly without an adult's support. This results in simple words frequently being spelled incorrectly.
- Pupils make strong progress in writing overall. However, pupils' work is not presented neatly because there is not a consistently applied approach to teaching handwriting in the school. Pupils are not given enough chances to practise their writing skills in subjects other than English. There are also too few opportunities for pupils to edit and improve their own work. This limits the progress that some pupils make.
- A new scheme for teaching mathematics has been introduced. Activities are planned to include practical application of the skills pupils are taught. Pupils are given open-ended tasks to do so that they can demonstrate their understanding at a deeper level. Homework also reinforces learning within the classroom. Pupils' mathematics books show clearly that they are making strong progress in applying their knowledge, skills and understanding to solving problems.
- I also looked at how well the provision in early years promotes the development of the key skills that children need to prepare them for Year 1. This is because in 2017 there was a decrease in the proportion of children that achieved a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year. It is clear that, although some children enter early years with low starting points, most children make good progress by the end of the Reception Year so that they are ready for Year 1.
- Language development is promoted well by all adults, who are skilled at intervening at appropriate points to move children's learning on. The early years provision is a nurturing environment where children are well cared for and are taught to care for the environment. For example, children were excited to feed and handle newly hatched chicks and to talk about how their tadpoles had grown into frogs. Children are also encouraged to take risks safely. For example, children are shown how to carry equipment carefully while constructing ramps in the outdoor area.
- I also reviewed how effective the teaching of phonics is in supporting pupils to develop fluency in reading. Outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check have been below the national average for the past four years. However, inspection evidence shows clearly that pupils are making strong progress in phonics overall, sometimes from very low starting points.
- The teaching of phonics is consistent across all classes with a clear structure to each session. Pupils are taught to break words down into individual sounds in order to spell and to blend sounds together in order to read. Pupils make good progress in learning to read and write as a result of this effective

teaching. However, pupils do not always apply the strategies they have been taught when reading and writing by themselves.

- Finally, I checked the school's provision for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders have a clear understanding of pupils' specific, and sometimes complex, needs and the barriers to their learning. Consequently, leaders and governors make wise decisions about the use of pupil premium funding. Additional funding is used well to provide more targeted support for those pupils who need help to catch up with their learning. The difference between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally is reducing in reading and mathematics, particularly as they progress through the school. However, disadvantaged pupils continue to make less progress in developing their writing skills.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that pupils' attainment in writing rises to at least the national average at the end of Year 2 by:

- ensuring that teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to write at length, across a range of subjects, and practise their basic writing skills
- encouraging pupils to edit and improve their own work independently
- raising expectations about the quality and presentation of pupils' 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 Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Pauline MacMillan  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

We discussed the key lines of enquiry for this inspection, the school's internal evaluation of its performance, plans for future improvement and information about current pupils' progress and attainment. During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the head of school, phase leaders, the pastoral support manager, five governors including the chair of the governing body, administrative staff and a representative from the local authority. I undertook joint observations, with the head of school, of teaching and learning, in all classes. I looked at a sample of pupils' current work across a range of subjects. I spoke informally to a number of pupils in classrooms about their learning, and met with a group of pupils to talk about their school experience. I scrutinised the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures and the records of checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children. I considered the

views of parents through 14 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and seven free-text messages.