

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Tracy Coombs
Headteacher
Higham Primary School
School Lane
Higham
Rochester
Kent
ME3 7JL

Dear Mrs Coombs

Short inspection of Higham Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 June 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 October 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 provide highly effective leadership and have created a strong senior leadership team. Together with your governors, you have made sure that the school's performance has improved steadily over the past few years. As a result, pupils make good progress during their time in school and achieve well. In 2017, the proportion of pupils who achieved age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6 was above that found nationally. Outcomes in mathematics were particularly strong.

You, your staff and the governors work positively and constructively together. There is no complacency but a shared determination and team effort to provide the best for pupils. Teachers ensure that, generally, all groups of pupils make good progress. You have effective arrangements to support pupils who may be falling behind in their learning or who need an additional boost to consolidate and catch up in their learning. You also successfully meet the needs of a small number of pupils in a nurture class.

You have worked hard in the areas you were asked to improve on at the previous inspection. There is now a strong culture within the school of sharing and using adults' expertise, and expectations are high. You have developed the effective leadership skills of middle leaders so they have a greater impact on the quality of

provision and pupils' outcomes. In addition, you have accurately identified, through effective monitoring, your key priorities for further development. You recognise that boys do not do as well as girls in school in reading and writing. While the boys often achieve as well as boys nationally, the girls in general do far better than girls nationally. You have actions in place to address this disparity, starting in the early years. We agreed that the opportunity for you and governors to monitor the success of your actions would be greater if your plans were more explicitly related to boys in your school improvement plan.

You provide a calm, orderly and welcoming atmosphere and a strong work ethic which is highly conducive to pupils' learning. Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and enjoy coming to school. Attendance is above average. Groups of pupils were hard pressed to think of anything they would like to improve. They said their teachers were kind and fun, and helped them understand if they were stuck. Pupils are polite, friendly and respectful of each other and adults. Pupils behave exceptionally well, as reported in the previous inspection. Playground buddies enjoy their responsibilities, and older and younger pupils mix together very well.

Only a small number of parents responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. A substantial number completed your own survey. Taken together, these show that parents and carers are positive about the school, and the very large majority would recommend the school to other parents. One parent wrote: 'Higham is a lovely community school and the staff are really friendly. You can tell that they really do care about the pupils, this is shown in how happy the pupils are.'

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a culture of safeguarding in the school. You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are in place and are fit for purpose. You and your deputy headteachers are all trained as designated safeguarding leaders and so there is always someone in school for staff to go to if they have any concerns. Your systems for recording concerns are effective and shared easily and quickly with those who need to know, including outside agencies when appropriate.

You ensure that staff receive regular training. They are vigilant in identifying any child who may be at risk, and know the procedures to follow. Pupils said they feel safe and that they are confident to talk to adults in school if they have any problems. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations, including online safety. Parents agree that their children feel safe and are well looked after in school. One parent wrote: 'There is a happy, caring attitude throughout the school.'

Inspection findings

- At the beginning of the inspection, as well as looking at the effectiveness of safeguarding, we agreed to focus on: why pupils' achievement in mathematics was stronger than that in reading and writing; whether pupils are sufficiently challenged to do their very best; why boys do not do as well as girls in the school

in reading and writing; and how well the curriculum supports the learning of all groups.

- Mathematics has been a major focus for the school. Strong leadership in the subject by the deputy headteacher led to considerable improvement in pupils' achievement and it remains a strength of the school. Pupils demonstrate confident reasoning and problem-solving skills. They are increasingly able to show and explain their thinking and develop a deeper understanding. In 2017, progress was better in mathematics than it was in reading and writing. This year you have focused on reading and writing, and achievement is more even across the three subjects. By Year 6, however, more pupils are on track to achieve the higher standard in mathematics than in reading or writing.
- The most able pupils continue to make generally strong progress and achieve well overall. Work in pupils' books and their contributions during lessons demonstrate the school's success in ensuring that the current most able pupils achieve well, although there is a little unevenness across classes. Teachers mostly have high expectations and provide challenging work. You acknowledge, however, that sometimes there is scope to provide more demanding work to increase the number of pupils who excel in their learning. For example, on occasion, the most able pupils start with the same tasks as others before moving on to greater challenges, which limits the time they have to develop their depth of learning. There are sometimes too few opportunities for pupils to be resourceful and take the initiative in making decisions to extend their learning more effectively.
- Leaders are taking successful steps to improve boys' achievement. You are focusing on the provision for boys starting in the early years. Careful consideration is given to topic themes which motivate all children, and boys in particular. This is having a positive impact on boys' achievement in reading and writing, which were the areas where they were not doing as well as boys nationally in 2017. Gaps remain in the achievement of boys compared to girls in the rest of the school but are narrowing slightly. You have correctly identified the need to continue working to ensure that your approaches are embedded throughout the school.
- You are understandably proud of the quality of your vibrant and well-planned curriculum. Music, art and sports have a high profile in the school and add depth and breadth to pupils' learning. You harness the expertise of teachers and other staff to ensure high-quality provision and pupils' good achievement in a range of subjects. Subject leaders ensure that activities meet the needs as well as the interests of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged. You have already, correctly, identified extending the use of the outdoor area in the early years to enrich children's experiences.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there is a continued focus on raising the achievement of boys

- pupils are consistently challenged to achieve as well as they can.

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

Yours sincerely

Margaret Coussins
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the two deputy headteachers and the chair of the governing body. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. I talked with pupils during their lessons, at break and at lunchtime. I observed learning in all classes at least once, and you accompanied me on many of these visits. I took account of 24 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 11 free-text comments. As this was quite a small response, I also looked at 118 responses to your own recent questionnaire for parents. I spoke with some parents at the start of the school day. I reviewed the school's website and sampled a range of school documents, including information about pupils' achievement, the school improvement plan and documents relating to safeguarding. We discussed your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness.