

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Amanda Mitchelson
Headteacher
Old Heath Community Primary School
Old Heath Road
Colchester
Essex
CO2 8DD

Dear Amanda Mitchelson

Short inspection of Old Heath Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 29 September 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 March 2012.

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 many changes to both leadership and staff in the last two years. At the end of the autumn term 2014, the long-standing headteacher and deputy headteacher left the school. During the spring term 2015, the newly appointed deputy headteacher led the school. You were appointed to the post of headteacher in the summer term, 2015.

During your first term, you experienced difficulty recruiting staff to fill two teaching vacancies. You explored many options and you successfully managed to fully staff the school for the autumn term 2015. However, due to unforeseen circumstances the school once again required new staff. You made the decision to job-share, teaching with your special educational needs coordinator, and did so for a considerable amount of the last academic year. During this turbulent time, the deputy headteacher left the school and you, therefore, now have a new deputy headteacher who took up this post four weeks ago. It is to your credit that the school is fully staffed this year and you have appointed key leaders to strengthen the leadership team.

Most pupils have continued to make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics since the previous inspection. Early indications for 2016 at the end of key stage 2 are that this progress will continue, although progress is less strong in mathematics.

Pupils who are disadvantaged and those who are also most able also make good progress from their varying starting points. The vast majority of teachers have high expectations of pupils. There are a minority of examples where this is not always the case. You recognise, for example, that some most-able pupils are not always given as much challenge as they could be. As a result, sometimes their progress is not as good as it should be, particularly in mathematics. In fact, some pupils told me that 'maths is easy'. Currently, some pupils are not making as much progress as their classmates. However, you and your leaders are aware of where this is the case and that it is not widespread.

You have spent much of the last year teaching because of difficulties in recruiting staff. Not enough time has, therefore, been devoted to accurately evaluating the impact of actions that you put in place. You have begun to reflect on where you now need to make improvements. You now have a full staffing complement and new leaders who are already beginning to effectively lead areas of key priority. Not only will this allow you to delegate areas of responsibility to others, as should be the case, but it will also enable you to hold all leaders to account for improving pupils' outcomes. This, in turn, will enable governors, who have demonstrated clearly that they can and do challenge leaders, to be more focused on checking on progress against emerging priorities.

In the previous report, the school was asked to improve on how well teaching assistants support pupils' learning. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their individual starting points. This is because this area of the school is very effectively led and managed. Tracking of pupils' progress is regular and rigorous. Where additional need is identified, support is quickly put in place and teaching assistants are given further training to ensure that the impact of their work with pupils is maximised. The special educational needs coordinator works closely with the educational psychologist who provides her with valuable advice and support when necessary. Capitalising on teaching assistants' individual strengths and interests, and building staff expertise in specific areas of need, is already beginning to pay dividends.

The mathematics lead is new to the school. He is a mathematics specialist who has already begun to improve leadership of this area apace. He has a clear plan of the areas that need to be further developed, recognising that problem-solving and encouraging pupils to think about themselves as able mathematicians are key priorities. We saw examples today of pupils really challenging themselves. For example, in Year 6 pupils were identifying different angles and thinking about what they already know about degrees of angles. The thinking behind working out 'the missing angle' was very clearly explained. As a result, and in a very short space of time, pupils moved on in their learning in leaps and bounds. The planned sharing of this leader's expertise across the school is increasing the confidence of teachers and teaching assistants. It was clear from my visit that this approach is welcomed by leaders and staff alike.

During the inspection we looked at pupils' learning in most classes. Teachers have high expectations about behaviour and pupils settle quickly to their work.

Pupils are keen to show their knowledge and their thinking because you have engendered an ethos of support and care for them. I observed numerous examples of pupils supporting others and helping them if, for example, they were unsure about what to do. The quality of discussion in most lessons between pupils themselves, and between pupils and adults, is high. It was evident throughout the school that this is indeed where 'children learn, achieve and enjoy success', as Old Heath's motto suggests.

Pupils are welcoming and polite, greeting visitors confidently and warmly, and are keen to share news of their achievements. They said that they really look forward to seeing who is awarded the 'Old Heath heart', a weekly award given to pupils for doing something special. 'It is very, very hard to get because there is only one award in each key stage,' pupils excitedly told me. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is a strength of the school. It is apparent in many ways, and through the many different activities in which pupils engage.

Safeguarding is effective.

All safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements. School leaders and governors ensure that robust procedures for the safety and well-being of all pupils are applied with rigour. Training for all staff and governors in safeguarding is regular and fully up to date. As headteacher, you have specific responsibility for child protection and work very closely with staff from other agencies when any safeguarding concerns arise. Records related to child protection are maintained well.

The progress of the most vulnerable pupils is monitored closely to ensure that their needs are fully met. In partnership with the special educational needs coordinator, you ensure that the best possible support is available for those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Case studies of individual pupils are of very high quality. The chronology of intervention is clearly evidenced and impact recorded carefully. Pupils are very well supported, as are their families. As a result, the attendance of the most vulnerable pupils, while still below the national average, is slowly improving.

Pupils say that they feel very safe in their 'caring' school because Old Heath is like 'a family'. Pupils say that they have a responsibility to 'look after and care for' their friends, which was evident during my visit. They know who to go to if they have any concerns. They say that any incidents of bullying and poor behaviour are rare and if they do happen they are quickly dealt with. Inspection evidence seen during my visit confirms this to be so. The vast majority of parents who responded to Parent View said that their children are happy, safe and enjoy coming to school. One comment among many, was: 'The children are cared for and looked after by the whole school, and I mean the whole school. This feeling of security, I believe helps the children learn and succeed.'

The school's website is not fully compliant. You have experienced considerable

technical difficulties and have recognised that the site will need to be rebuilt. However, during my visit I was able to evidence that statutory aspects of the school's work, although not shown on the website, are available in the school. You have, for example, ensured that parents receive regular updates to try to combat the issue with the reliability of the website. Policies are also largely up to date and reflect the latest legislation. Some policies are awaiting review at the first governing body meeting for the autumn term.

Inspection findings

- The school has continued to improve since the previous inspection, despite a turbulent period. You have successfully appointed new staff so that the school now has a full complement for the first time in the last two years. Any teaching that has not been good enough, you have dealt with decisively. As a result, the negative impact that this has had on pupils' outcomes has been minimal.
- Over time, pupils at the end of key stage 2 make good progress from their starting points, including the most able pupils, those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those pupils who are disadvantaged, including the most able disadvantaged. Recently, the proportion making the progress expected of pupils their age has been above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion exceeding expected progress in reading and writing was above the national average, while the proportion in mathematics was below. Early indications for 2016 show that pupils' progress was at least in line with the national average in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2.
- Throughout the school, current pupils are making at least expected progress as defined by the school. A growing proportion are exceeding expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics. There is, however, less progress made in mathematics by pupils in a minority of classes. Within these classes, the progress of some who are most able or who have fallen behind is below that of their classmates.
- School leaders are beginning to make effective use of assessment information to monitor school performance. Expectations for the new national curriculum have been shared with all teachers and these are being used to plan for pupils' learning. The progress of pupils is tracked regularly. However, this information is not yet used effectively to identify some underachievement and target extra support if it is needed. As a result, there are pockets of underachievement, particularly in mathematics.
- I visited many classes. Pupils were engaged in their learning, knew what they were learning, and were keen to share their experiences with me and their classmates. As a result, there was a buzz of interest in almost all classes. However, some pupils were not challenged as much as they could be, and particularly in mathematics. Pupils are articulate and eager to learn. Some opportunities were missed to move pupils on in their learning even when pupils were asking to do so.
- The early years provision is a strength of the school because leadership of this area is very effective. When I visited, children in this class had only been in

school for a very short period of time. However, they were very settled and have already made good relationships with adults. The children play with and alongside their peers, and also independently, using a variety of activities that leaders have carefully selected to develop their skills. The outdoor area is very well developed and used well, even in the drizzling rain, as was the case when I visited.

- Adults support learning well with very timely but sensitive questioning, and, as a result, elicit good responses from children. Leaders have established good relationships with parents and other link provisions. As a consequence, adults know where children are in their learning and track their progress meticulously. The current class of Reception children are articulate and able. The early assessments reflect this. Historically, children make good progress in the Reception class and are well prepared for Year 1.
- Scrutiny of pupils' work in mathematics throughout the school evidences that a growing proportion of pupils are exceeding the progress expected of them. There are some examples of teachers challenging pupils and pupils' responses. However, these are not yet commonplace. As a result, some pupils do not make as much progress as they can, especially those who are most able and those who are currently attaining below their peers.
- Development of the school's wider leadership is at an early phase. Many teachers and leaders are relatively new to their posts. Some embarked on their new roles at the beginning of September. Improvement planning is not, therefore, as sharply focused as it needs to be to ensure that all pupils make as much progress as they can. Some leaders do not yet fully understand the part they play in whole-school improvement. This is essential so that the school continues to focus on the right priorities and also so that all leaders can be held to account for pupils' achievement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- improvement planning at all levels is sharpened so that the focus is firmly on the progress of all pupils
- all leaders who hold key positions understand the part they play in whole-school improvement and are held to account for the outcomes of all pupils
- assessment information is used effectively to highlight and regularly check on pupils who are at risk of falling behind or who are not making as much progress as they should be
- the progress of pupils in mathematics improves, particularly for those who are most able and those who are currently attaining below their peers.

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

Yours sincerely

Ruth Brock
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the deputy headteacher, mathematics lead and special educational needs coordinator. I also met with three governors including the vice-chair of the governing body. I had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. I reviewed a wide range of documentation including policies, attendance information and governing body minutes. Together with your senior leaders, we looked at numerous examples of pupils' work in their books from the last academic year. I observed learning in classes, much of which was with you. A thorough examination of the school's safeguarding arrangements was undertaken. I held a discussion with a group of 12 pupils and with various pupils during their lessons, listening to some of them read. I also reviewed the 32 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 29 free text messages.