

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



17 May 2019

Mr Mark Roddison
Headteacher
Aston Hall Junior and Infant School
Church Lane
Aston
Sheffield
South Yorkshire
S26 2AX

Dear Mr Roddison

Short inspection of Aston Hall Junior and Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 9 May 2019, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in November 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You joined the school a year ago, following a period of turbulence in staffing and leadership within the school and the trust. You have brought to the school raised expectations and much-needed stability. As a result, staff morale is now high and staff are committed to ensuring that each pupil receives the best possible educational experience. You are ambitious for pupils and, although the quality of teaching is good, you are working with determination to strengthen it further.

You have ensured that leadership is strong in a number of areas, including in English, mathematics and for disadvantaged pupils. Senior and middle leaders are knowledgeable and passionate about their areas of responsibility. Working with you, they are skilled in identifying appropriate priorities for improvement and they check thoroughly on the difference their actions have made. They can demonstrate clearly how they have strengthened the quality of teaching and, hence, improved pupils' outcomes.

The governing body has been newly formed this year. Although vacancies still exist, the members who are in place have a range of suitable knowledge and expertise. You provide governors with detailed information about the quality of teaching, pupils' outcomes and attendance. Governors have a nominated member with

oversight of disadvantaged pupils who holds leaders to account effectively for pupil premium spending. Governors challenge you and other leaders appropriately to aspire for the best possible education and outcomes for pupils.

The trust leadership team and new chief executive officer have a clear focus on professional development for staff. They foster partnerships between trust schools well to provide training and leadership opportunities for staff. They place high value on maintaining the individual character of the school and keenly share your ambition for pupils' successes.

The majority of parents and carers hold positive views of the work of the school. They praise the effective teaching their children receive and appreciate that their children are happy in school. However, some parents express dissatisfaction with regard to the communication between school and home, particularly in relation to special events.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that an effective culture of safeguarding exists in the school. Staff are aware of their responsibilities in keeping children safe and are knowledgeable about the risks pupils may face.

The designated safeguarding leader was new to the school this year and has built firm relationships with pupils and their families. She understands the circumstances that make some families vulnerable. She communicates well with external agencies and does so in a timely way.

Appropriate checks are in place to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children. Records in respect of this are well maintained.

You and your staff place a high value on nurturing pupils' social and emotional development. Pupils are polite and respectful, and they behave well. A caring atmosphere is evident and pupils have positive relationships with adults in the school. Pupils say that they trust members of staff to support them with any worries they may have. You have ensured that pupils understand how to stay safe in a range of contexts, including online.

Overall attendance has been above average since the school opened. However, this has not been the case for disadvantaged pupils, who have missed more school than their national counterparts. Following this, you introduced a range of strategies including incentives for good attendance and support for families where low or falling attendance is evident. Initiatives such as the attendance bear prize and invitations to breakfast club have been successful in improving attendance for this group of pupils. As a result, attendance for disadvantaged pupils is now above average.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have worked hard to improve pupils' outcomes in reading. To this end, in 2017, they introduced a new approach to teaching reading. Pupils across key stages 1 and 2 now have daily reading lessons which focus on developing their comprehension skills. As a result, pupils demonstrate effective strategies when exploring books and texts to retrieve information or infer meaning.
- Professional development for teaching staff has enabled them to pose suitably challenging reading comprehension questions for pupils. Teachers typically have high expectations of pupils' responses and encourage them well to think deeply about their reading. Training has resulted in particularly strong subject knowledge for those teaching in upper key stage 2. In key stage 1, where a new teaching team was established this academic year, teachers' subject knowledge is developing. Consequently, sometimes activities for the most able and for lower-attaining pupils are not well matched to their needs.
- Teaching staff benefit from sharing in the high level of expertise provided by the English leader. She has worked with staff to select a range of novels for each year group to study which staff believe will feed pupils' thirst for reading. These novels are suitably complex and chosen to support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Texts are also often linked to pupils' learning in other subjects. For example, during the inspection, the Year 4 class novel was linked to learning in history about Ancient Egypt. Pupils generally express very positive views about reading and most read with accuracy and expression.
- You have ensured that teachers use reading lessons well to broaden pupils' vocabulary. They place considerable emphasis on exposing pupils to unfamiliar words through the texts they choose and the phrasing of reading comprehension questions. Consequently, pupils typically have wide-ranging vocabularies and are articulate when discussing their learning.
- Since the school opened, published pupils' outcomes for all key stages show that pupils' progress and attainment in reading are typically average. Although this is a positive picture, you are clear in your ambition to ensure that pupils excel and reach their full potential. The improvements in the quality of teaching reading are resulting in current pupils making strong progress.
- Along with other leaders, you have ensured that the teaching of phonics is effective for most pupils. Teachers assess pupils' phonics knowledge regularly and use this to plan teaching appropriately for the large majority of pupils. However, teaching for some lower-attaining pupils does not consistently offer pupils sufficient opportunities to hear and practise decoding of words. Additionally, for this group of pupils, the books they use to practise their skills are not always well matched to their phonics knowledge. This means that, when they come across unfamiliar words, they lose confidence and resort to guessing the words using the pictures. These shortcomings mean that lower-attaining pupils do not always develop early reading skills as well as they should.
- You have ensured that pupil premium funding is spent effectively to support disadvantaged pupils. Leaders have a detailed view of the barriers to learning faced by each individual disadvantaged pupil. They are creative in using the

funding to promote pupils' personal and academic development. This is often in response to pupils' interests. For example, where pupils have an interest in learning a musical instrument, tuition delivered by specialists is arranged. Similarly, leaders focus on fostering pupils' aspirations through visits to specific workplaces. Leaders measure carefully the difference they have made and adjust their bespoke plans appropriately.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- phonics teaching is effective for all pupils, particularly lower-attaining pupils, and the books they use to practise their early reading are well matched to their phonics knowledge
- teachers' subject knowledge in reading is further strengthened in key stage 1 so that all pupils receive work which consistently meets their needs
- effective systems are in place for communication with parents and for gathering parents' views.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Rotherham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Karine Hendley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, senior and middle leaders, the chief executive officer and the executive improvement partners for the trust. I also met with a group of 17 members of staff and two governors, including the chair of the governing body. I observed teaching and learning with you in every class across the school. I scrutinised pupils' work alongside middle leaders. I spoke to pupils, both formally and informally, and observed their behaviour around the school, including at playtime. I reviewed school documentation including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, as well as information about pupils' progress, attainment, behaviour and attendance. I met with parents at the start of the day and took account of the 52 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 33 free-text responses.