

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



3 July 2019

Mrs Leigh Gordon
Head of Academy
Mersey Primary Academy
Derwent Street
Hull
HU8 8TX

Dear Mrs Gordon

Short inspection of Mersey Primary Academy

Following my visit to the school on 26 June 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 the school was judged to be good in June 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Since your appointment in November 2018, you have worked assiduously to improve the quality of education pupils receive at Mersey Primary. In a short space of time, you have been successful in doing just that. This is because you, and other staff, place a significant emphasis on developing pupils' reading skills. Indeed, children in the early years provision begin reading on their very first day at school. In this way, no learning time is wasted.

The importance of reading is frequently promoted within the school. Pupils are able to visit the school science garden and learn while surrounded by characters from the Gruffalo children's book, such as Snake, Owl, Mouse and, of course, the Gruffalo himself. Furthermore, pupils' written work is celebrated in the corridors in the hand of Roald Dahl's BFG.

When I met with pupils and asked if they enjoyed reading, they responded in unison with a mighty 'YES!'. One pupil went on to explain why she enjoyed reading so much by saying, 'When I read, I feel like I am in the book. It is wonderful.' This comment was typical of many communicated to me by pupils during the inspection when asked about reading.

Leaders across the school and the multi-academy trust have researched and debated at length the books they want pupils to read. By doing so and ensuring that pupils across all schools in the trust learn the same challenging texts, staff are

quickly developing their own linguistic knowledge, while becoming experts in particular books and authors. This ensures that training activities for staff relating to reading are of a high quality and resources are shared widely.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff are familiar with pupils' emotional needs, ensuring that pupils always have someone to speak to if they have a worry or concern. This approach is effectively supported by an emotional well-being officer who coordinates additional support for pupils and their families when required. Consequently, staff are kept up to date and alerted to any signs that suggest a pupil is suffering, or is at risk of suffering, abuse, neglect or harm. Leaders make appropriate checks to ensure that staff are safe to work with children.

Your designated safeguarding leaders are knowledgeable. They understand well their responsibilities and take swift action to refer concerns to relevant bodies or agencies when there are concerns about the welfare of a pupil. For example, leaders have developed robust systems to ensure the whereabouts of pupils who stop attending school and that pupils are safe and well.

Pupils say that they feel safe. They appreciate the work of the school caretaker who checks the site each morning to ensure that the school yard and fields are safe to play in. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe when using the internet. Additionally, pupils were able to describe to me what bullying means to them. They recounted the acronym 'STOP', suggesting that, in their opinion, bullying means 'several times on purpose'.

Inspection findings

- Over time, pupils' reading progress across key stage 2 has been average. Furthermore, the proportion of Year 6 pupils who achieve the standard expected for their age in reading assessments at the end of key stage 2 has been consistently below the national average. This, and the fact that pupils' outcomes are stronger in writing and mathematics, meant that pupils' learning in reading was a significant focus during this inspection. Your own information, coupled with my observations of pupils' learning and scrutiny of pupils' work, demonstrates that your current pupils' progress in reading is improving.
- Routines and the use of consistent learning materials encourage pupils to respond swiftly to your teachers' instructions and ensure that pupils are confident to 'have a go' when pronouncing unfamiliar words or letter combinations. You and your staff have established an intense focus on developing a love for reading in pupils from a very early age and an effective teaching of phonics. These strategies have ensured that a larger proportion of pupils in Year 1 reached the expected standard in the phonics screening check this academic year than in previous years.
- While pupils read widely and often, opportunities to read to an adult vary across the school. More confident and fluent readers are listened to reading less often,

particularly in key stage 2. Similarly, while leaders describe their aim of staff giving an 'Oscar-winning performance' each time they read to pupils, opportunities for pupils to witness this and listen to adults read are inconsistent too.

- Your teachers quickly identify pupils who are not keeping up with the pace of the school's phonics programme or who need additional support with their reading. This is because teachers formally assess pupils' reading knowledge, skills and understanding successfully. When a pupil is seen to be struggling with a particular sound or group of sounds, teachers and teaching assistants liaise closely with each other to plan bespoke interventions which are intended to swiftly address pupils' misconceptions. Pupils are then provided with additional time to read and practise with staff. More often than not, this short and sharp approach ensures that pupils do not become disheartened when they are unable to overcome initial barriers to learning and so they persevere and grow in confidence.
- Your teachers provide pupils with books to read at home and at school that mostly match their phonics knowledge. However, occasionally, this is not the case and some pupils are asked to read books that are too easy or too difficult for their current reading ability. You and your leaders are in the process of reviewing the school library and resources so that pupils have a greater variety of books to choose from in order to build their reading fluency.
- You and your staff know that reading does not, and should not, stop at the school gates. You have all worked tirelessly to encourage parents and carers to read with their child at home and at school. For example, you host a weekly 'stay and read' session in which an increasing number of parents come into school to read to their children and listen to their children read. During this time, teachers model to parents the characteristics of effective reading and offer advice and guidance on how to teach and/or support phonics at home. Furthermore, parents are invited to rent reading books and attend reading celebration events.
- Pupils' improving progress in reading across the school is contributing to standards of writing composition improving also. Pupils, particularly in key stage 1, are able to form, articulate and communicate ideas well. They particularly enjoy creating an argument or writing persuasively. Pupils' transcription is less well developed. While the majority of pupils remember and use effectively the spelling rules that they learn in their phonics lessons, a minority of pupils sometimes forget to write in standard English and they intersperse their written work with words or phrases that they use in their everyday speech. For example, some pupils write, 'We was going' rather than 'We were going.' Additionally, some pupils continue to spell common words, such as the days of the week or the months of the year, incorrectly. These errors are not addressed by your teachers and so the errors recur.
- Pupils learn to write using joined handwriting in Reception. The vast majority of pupils are able to join their letters successfully by the end of Year 1. However, some pupils are unable to use successfully the strokes that are needed to join letters or understand which letters, when adjacent to one another, are best left not joined.

- Pupils' attitudes to their learning and the school are positive. Pupils apply themselves well to the learning tasks that teachers set. They ask questions readily and support their peers well during paired and group work. At social times, pupils play together enthusiastically, making good use of the apparatus and resources available to them. Pupils report that there is a large number of staff watching over them as they play. They appreciate the high levels of supervision and say that this helps to keep them safe. There are very few pupils who are excluded for a fixed period and no pupils have been permanently excluded in recent years.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the books pupils read at home and at school closely match their phonics knowledge
- standards of pupils' handwriting improve
- pupils are provided with consistent and frequent opportunities to read to adults and to listen to adults read to them.

I am copying this letter to 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 Kingston upon Hull. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lee Elliott
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you and other members of the leadership team and trust. Together, we visited classrooms to evaluate pupils' learning. I met with the chair of the governing body, a representative from the trust, the subject leader for literacy and pupils. I spoke in person with a number of parents prior to the start of the school day. I observed staff listening to pupils read and visited the early years setting to speak with leaders and observe children's learning. Prior to the inspection, I analysed the school's website and evaluated a wide range of additional documentation. During the inspection, I evaluated safeguarding arrangements, including the record of suitability checks on staff, safeguarding policies and associated files, referrals and attendance records. I also scrutinised pupils' writing and reading books with senior and subject leaders. I considered the 25 responses from parents to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and responses from the two members of staff who responded to

Ofsted's online staff survey.