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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs G Mawdsley
Headteacher
Middlemarch School
College Street
Nuneaton
Warwickshire
CV10 7BQ

Dear Mrs G Mawdsley

Short inspection of Middlemarch School

Following my visit to the school on 3 April 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.

Your effective leadership contributes well to the ongoing improvements seen in the school in the last three years. You have worked well with other leaders to refine teaching and, as a result, pupils' attainment has risen. There is a strong sense of teamwork among staff and all those who completed Ofsted's staff survey said that they feel supported by leaders. High staff morale translates into the ethos of the school. Pupils receive good social, emotional and academic support. They enjoy school, behave well and are well prepared for secondary school.

Leaders and staff have worked well to manage changes in pupil intake in recent years. The number of new pupils joining from overseas, or from other schools, has increased significantly. For example, this academic year alone 25 new pupils have joined different year groups in the school. Some of these pupils have complex needs and this has taken time and resources to help them settle successfully.

Pupils' attainment at the end of key stage 2 was not high enough in 2016. However, you have responded well to this and attainment has risen every year since. Mathematics teaching is effective and at the end of key stage 2 in 2018 the proportion of pupils who attained the expected and higher standards was similar to the national average. The work in pupils' books demonstrates that pupils make very good progress in upper key stage 2. However, pupils' progress is not consistently strong in lower key stage 2.

You have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and pupils' progress. The school improvement plan has generally been fit for purpose over time. For example, it has supported the actions that have taken place to improve disadvantaged pupils' attainment and the positive work to improve the culture for reading across the school. You recently made a change to the layout of the improvement plan and it is now not as clear as it should be. It does not set out clearly enough which leaders are responsible for actions or the precise timescales in which actions need to be take place.

Areas for improvement from the last inspection have been addressed. You reviewed the presentation policy and the approach to teaching handwriting. Most pupils take pride in their work and present it well. There has been an increased and successful focus on supporting pupils who do not have a strong grasp of phonics when they start the school in Year 3. You have also made sure that pupils who speak English as an additional language are given good support on their journey through school.

Pupils enjoy the broad range of enrichment opportunities that are provided. During the inspection, they talked of the different extra-curricular clubs that they attend. Examples include Lego, art, cooking, brownies, basketball and football. Pupils also really enjoy music lessons such as learning to play the drums or clarinet.

The specialist provision on-site for pupils with communication and interaction needs provides excellent support for the four pupils on roll. Nurturing relationships and well-planned work help pupils to progress well and enjoy school.

The governing body provides effective challenge and support to you. Governors take their roles seriously and have a good understanding of where improvements need to be made. For example, they commissioned a review of the pupil premium and have ensured that leaders have taken successful action to raise attainment.

Safeguarding is effective.

The arrangements for safeguarding are fit for purpose. The training that is put on for staff has an obvious impact on their understanding. Staff have a good knowledge of their safeguarding responsibilities and report concerns to safeguarding leads quickly and effectively. You make sure that concerns are followed up effectively and make referrals to the local authority in a timely way. You are, also, not afraid to challenge external bodies where support for pupils or families is not good enough.

The checks that are carried out for the safe recruitment of staff are very well organised and thorough.

Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves safe. During the inspection, pupils had a crystal-clear view of the dangers that can be associated with the internet. They know that they must not give out personal information and to quickly tell a trusted adult if they are concerned about something that they see online. Pupils value the range of visitors that come into school to talk about safety.

For example, pupils talked about what they had learned about fire and road safety. You ensure that pupils are growing up with good self-awareness, so that they can be vigilant and ask for help when they sense something is not right.

Inspection findings

- The teaching of reading has improved since the previous inspection. Pupils enjoy reading and talk excitedly about the novels that they read together in class. The whole-class texts are used to create follow-up, comprehension activities. In some classes, this approach is working extremely well. For example, during the inspection, teachers in Year 6 used good questioning to develop pupils' understanding of their text, 'Goodnight Mr Tom'. Pupils enjoyed learning new vocabulary and trying to infer meaning from the author's writing.
- Across the school, there has been a much-improved focus on developing pupils' comprehension skills. Sometimes, follow-up tasks in pupils' books demonstrate that the level of challenge is not consistently strong. While reading attainment has risen in recent years, it is still not high enough.
- You have raised the profile of reading by using a range of stimulating texts and developed a new library. Home-reading records are used well by most pupils and indicate that pupils read their books on a regular basis. Most pupils' books match well to their reading ability and they read fluently. However, occasionally, weaker readers are choosing books that are too challenging and need too much support to read words that they are not familiar with.
- The journey of curriculum design has been carefully considered in recent years. There is a high proportion of boys in the school, compared to the national average. You designed the curriculum topics so that they would appeal to all, but particularly to boys. This is starting to prove successful. The curriculum is generally broad and balanced. Teachers make sure that pupils receive opportunities to write across different subjects, such as history and science. Pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding develop particularly well in subjects such as art, science, and music. Pupils really enjoy the wider, curriculum subjects and spoke enthusiastically about the dance lessons in physical education.
- The provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is good. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) was appointed in the autumn term and has started the appropriate SENCo training. She works well with a lead teaching assistant and other staff to plan and monitor successful additional support. There are a significant number of pupils with complex needs and the proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan is above the national average. There are also several more EHC plans going through the application process. Leaders work well with external agencies to make sure that pupils with complex needs get the support that they need.
- The number of pupils who are on the register for SEND support is too high. The criteria for identifying pupils to go on the register is not clear enough. A high number of pupils start school in Year 3 already identified with SEND from their previous school. Historically, leaders have not reviewed this regularly enough and some pupils remain on the register unnecessarily.

- Overall, absence is not seriously concerning but it is above the national average. The absence rate for disadvantaged pupils is too high. You do monitor absence levels and intervene to support pupils and families. Much of this work focuses on putting in place family support. In some isolated cases, this has had a positive impact. However, this approach has not had a successful impact for all and leaders have not provided enough challenge in places. For example, where you have identified individual attendance concerns you are yet to make attendance referrals to the local authority.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the new approaches to the teaching of reading are fully embedded, so that all pupils receive a high level of support and challenge in their reading
- pupils' progress in lower key stage 2 is consistently strong across all classes
- the school improvement is further developed, so that it clearly outlines who is responsible for actions and the precise timescales for those actions to take place
- attendance rates improve for disadvantaged pupils
- the criteria in place for identifying pupils with SEND is clearer and pupils who do not need to be on the register are taken off.

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

Yours sincerely

Matt Meekin
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and several other leaders. I met with three governors and spoke to the local authority school improvement adviser on the telephone. I spoke to pupils informally and formally. I made short visits to nine lessons and looked at a range of pupils' books. I spoke to parents at the start of the day and considered the free-text responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also considered the responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire.