

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



26 July 2016

Miss Tineke van de Ploeg
Headteacher
Mill Lane Community Primary School
Mill Lane
Chinnor
Oxfordshire
OX39 4RF

Dear Miss van der Ploeg

Short inspection of Mill Lane Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 28 June 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 September 2011.

This school continues to be good.

Leaders have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have established a school that is truly at the heart of its community. You have worked very effectively to ensure that all those who work in, attend and visit the school are very well supported. You know every pupil and their individual foibles. As a result, pupils really like coming to school and value their education. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of you and appreciate your leadership. Parents describe you as 'an amazing asset' and 'a fantastic leader' who shows 'both care and common sense'.

Since your appointment you have improved the way in which you and your leaders evaluate your work. You have reflected on aspects of the school which require further attention and have addressed these with zest and urgency. As result, teaching in the school is mostly very effective across all key stages and there are consistent approaches to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding in the different subjects they learn. Standards in English and mathematics continue to be high and above the national average. Where standards are not as high as you would like, for example in writing or reading, you and your leaders have taken appropriate action to address this. Although attendance has improved, you acknowledge that there is more that you can do to support those few pupils who do not attend regularly enough.

The school works particularly well with the Thame Partnership, a local collaboration of schools. You and your leaders have used this partnership to improve your work by checking that your moderation and assessment of pupils' work is accurate. You work well in partnership with the local authority, which supports you when appropriate. You have also established strong partnerships with local sports clubs including Oxford United Football Club.

You have established a real team ethos at Mill Lane Community Primary school, where leaders and staff contribute to all aspects of school improvement. The systems to manage staff performance and well-being are very effective so staff feel well supported. Leaders describe you as a great coach who has improved the way they work. They, in turn, use coaching and mentoring skills to lead their teams more effectively. In the Ofsted survey all staff reported that they are happy and proud to work in the school and that they value your leadership highly.

You have addressed the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection effectively.

- You have introduced new approaches to planning for the most able so that they make more progress than previously. Over the last three years the most able pupils have achieved broadly similar standards to other able pupils nationally in English and mathematics. Following the improvements you have made, school information shows that the most able are currently exceeding the standards expected of them in most year groups in these subjects. However, you recognise the need for teachers to develop their approach further to ensure that all these pupils reach their potential.
- Strong leadership is now embedded across the school. You have established a team approach that is working well in raising the quality of teaching. Middle leaders are collaborating well so that joint planning, moderation and assessment are now more effective than in the past. Staff who are new to the school or the profession are well supported to meet leaders' high standards.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. There are suitable systems in place to keep children safe. You make careful and thorough checks on all staff as well as ensuring that all staff are trained appropriately. You work effectively with your partners in social services and the local authority and you are tenacious in holding these agencies to account so that your pupils receive the best care possible. Governors exercise good oversight of this aspect of the school's work and regularly visit to see that all is as it should be. Pupils feel very safe and well cared for, and parents also endorse this with one commenting that their children 'feel confident and safe attending the school every day'.

Inspection findings

- You and the governors know the school well; your evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for improvement is accurate and thorough. The school raising achievement plan is a useful document that you use to improve standards, although you are clear that there are still a few areas of the school's work that require further attention.
- You have fine-tuned the assessment system that you developed last year. As a result, you and other leaders have to hand accurate information on how much progress pupils make. Teachers use this information effectively. For example, in a Year 5 mathematics lesson, the teacher skilfully explored different approaches to tackling long-multiplication because pupils were able to use the most common method confidently.
- Since you took up your post, in 2012, governors are now more strategic and committed than in the past. Governors have changed the structure of their committees to improve the quality of their work. They also regularly visit the school to explore how much progress leaders are making in addressing whole-school priorities. Governors are also increasingly effective when challenging leaders about the impact of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils.
- In 2015, most-able pupils' attainment in mathematics and writing was broadly in line with the national average in key stage 1 but below the national figure in reading and writing in key stage 2. Current information shows that some of these pupils are developing depth and mastery in some of their subjects. However, too few pupils are currently exceeding expectations in writing and in mathematics.
- You have correctly identified that the standard of boys' writing is too low and that pupils' skills in spelling also require attention. You are taking the right steps to address this with a school-wide focus on improving spelling strategies and well-targeted interventions to support boys' writing.
- You have worked very effectively to improve standards in mathematics. In 2014 and 2015 all pupils made the progress expected of them, with some groups also achieving slightly more than this. Pupils currently in school are typically making good progress in mathematics across all key stages. They are increasingly confident using a range of operations to solve problems and develop a mastery of each topic. However, you recognise that the most able are not yet given enough opportunities to use their reasoning skills to solve challenging problems.
- Pupils enjoy reading and standards are improving but in 2015 fewer pupils than you predicted reached the higher levels at the end of key stage 2. As a result, you have refreshed your approach to teaching reading so that there is more emphasis on developing the most able pupils' reading skills. For example, in a Year 3 guided reading lesson pupils improved their higher level comprehension skills as a result of focused and targeted teaching. Pupils are also more enthusiastic about reading following the 'extreme reading challenge' and 'campfire stories session' that you organised. Pupils

read widely and often, are well supported by their parents and enjoy reading a wide range of genres.

- In 2015, the number of children in the early years achieving a good level of development was well above the national average. Children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils also achieved well. You are not content to rest on your laurels and have worked with your staff to further improve the outdoor learning area so that pupils have more opportunities to develop their gross and fine motor skills.
- The teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) is a strength of the early years and key stage 1 teaching, and phonics knowledge is well-integrated into aspects of the curriculum. As a result, in 2016 there was a significant increase in the number of pupils who reached the expected standard. Those few pupils in Year 2 who did not reach the standard previously have caught up and the vast majority reached the expected level this year.
- In 2015, in the Reception Year and Year 1, disadvantaged pupils achieved well and this continues to be the case. The progress of the very few pupils who are disadvantaged or have special educational needs and/or disabilities is strong and the gap between their achievement and others is closing in key stage 2. However, you recognise that you want this gap to close more quickly. As a result, you have increased the quality of the additional support and interventions in place for these pupils.
- Pupils work hard and try their best. You have developed useful approaches to develop pupils' independence and resilience. For instance, in a Year 1 class pupils worked well on their own and in a Year 3 class pupils led different aspects of the guided reading session, supporting their peers.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is used well to challenge pupils to think and explore. Following a staff development session on teaching computer coding, pupils across the school are improving their understanding of computing. In Year 3, pupils have a good grasp of the basics of Spanish because their teacher uses the language in novel and interesting ways.
- The curriculum is lively and interesting. Different subjects are taught through different themes and pupils talk enthusiastically about the additional activities they take part in. Pupils particularly enjoy the outdoor learning week and relish the chance to make the most of the extensive grounds. There is a rich mix of additional activities led by school staff such as gardening and dance.
- There is effective use of the additional funding for sports so that pupils enjoy a wide range of opportunities and are developing their talents. Pupils take part in a wide range of sports but particularly enjoy the regular swimming lessons at a local school.
- Pupils are confident and polite when talking to visitors. They can take part in school life as members of the student council and are keen to share their views of what aspects of the school could be improved still further. Year 5 pupils act as mentors to pupils in the Reception Year to support the younger pupils' transition to key stage 1.

- The overall attendance of pupils is above the national average. There remain a few pupils who do not attend as regularly as they should. The school has good systems in place to support these pupils. However, you agree that you need to work more effectively in partnership with those parents whose children do not attend often enough.
- You work well in partnership with parents to support the learning of their children, living up to your vision that 'together we can succeed'. Consequently, parents are overwhelmingly positive about the work of the school and how well leaders communicate with them. There is a wide range of activities that parents can participate in including assemblies, trips and visits.
- Behaviour around the school is excellent. Pupils are warm and friendly to each other. They play together well and enjoy their social time. They follow instructions and listen attentively to each other and their teachers. Those few pupils who need additional support have benefited from the revised behaviour policies. Pupils, staff and parents all agree that standards of behaviour are very high.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- further refine teaching so that the most able develop a deeper level of understanding, especially in writing and mathematics in key stage 2
- strengthen the strategies to improve the attendance of those few pupils who do not attend frequently enough.

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

Yours sincerely

Seamus Murphy
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

One inspector visited the school for one day. The inspector met with you, your leaders and governors as well as making a phone call to a representative of the local authority. Policies around safeguarding, your own analyses of pupils' achievement and other documents were scrutinised. The inspector visited all year groups to see teaching and learning as well as visiting small-group sessions. There were formal and informal meeting with pupils. The inspector also looked at pupils'

work in lessons and with leaders. The 78 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and online questionnaires from staff and pupils were analysed as well as taking into account the views of parents who spoke to the inspector informally at the end of the school day.