

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



7 November 2018

Mr David Turner
Headteacher
Rift House Primary School
Masefield Road
Hartlepool
Cleveland
TS25 4JY

Dear Mr Turner

Short inspection of Rift House Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 18 October 2018, 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 December 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

The school has expanded in this time and, as the school has grown, so has leadership capacity. You are clear in your vision that, at Rift House, you work to ensure that 'every child will reach their full potential'. Leaders share your vision, as well as your passionate commitment to make this vision a reality. You have developed a strong and dedicated team to help improve the school for your pupils.

Rift House is a strong, cohesive community based upon an effective partnership between home and school. Leaders work hard to empower and encourage parents and carers to take a more active role in the education of their children. The school is – as its mission statement states – an 'inclusive, reflective and responsive school' that challenges, inspires and motivates both staff and pupils. Parents spoken to during the inspection and those who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were very positive about the school. One parent said: 'Teachers and other staff members at this school are so welcoming and friendly, they always have time to deal with any issues we have.' Another said, 'We always recommend the school to new parents.'

The school is a fully inclusive school that has many strengths. Pupil and staff behaviour are characterised by kindness, care and honesty. There is clear respect for all members of the school community. Pupils' behaviour is excellent. Pupils are engaged in, and enjoy, their learning. The 'senses curriculum' that you have

introduced brings learning to life and creates a sense of curiosity and wonder about the many diverse topics studied. The 'smell it, touch it, taste it, hear it' approach is innovative and exciting. Above all, it is leading to improved progress for pupils.

Pupils enjoy school and most arrive punctually. Leaders are very clear with both parents and pupils about the importance of good attendance. You clearly stated in our meeting that, for pupils, 'If you are here, you learn.' Your 'well-being team' offers excellent pastoral support to pupils and their families. However, too many younger pupils are persistently absent and you accept that continued action is needed to improve attendance.

At the last inspection, you were asked to raise pupils' achievement further by ensuring that pupils were secure in their understanding before moving on to new and more challenging learning. Leaders have sharpened teachers' practice through support and training. Consequently, pupils are making better progress across all subjects and key stages.

Leaders know the school's context and local community well. In September 2017, you introduced provision for children from the age of two. This provision, combined with your Nursery, helps to prepare children for school. The children are well cared for by your staff, and the activities on offer clearly aid their learning and development. As a result, they are better prepared for the Reception class.

Governors share leaders' ambitious vision for the school. They have taken decisive action to improve their own effectiveness. Governors have recently undergone a thorough review and reorganisation. Consequently, they are, collectively, more strategic and effective. The local authority confirms this view. Nevertheless, governors do not hold leaders to account well enough.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your staff know your pupils and their families very well. Leaders and teachers are visible and available at the start and end of each day. Parents and pupils stated that they are able to speak to members of staff on a daily basis. There is a strong culture of safeguarding through the school. You have developed an effective safeguarding team so that leaders can respond to pupils' needs in a timely manner. Staff and governors spoken with during the inspection had a secure understanding of the school's procedures. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Staff have an in-depth understanding of the school's context and your pupils' needs and vulnerabilities. They are, therefore, able to respond promptly to any issues that arise. Pupils feel – in their words – 'very safe' and 'well looked after'. You use the wider curriculum effectively to teach pupils how to keep safe in and beyond school. Children in the Reception class were able to talk with me about safety before they left on their visit. Pupils speak positively of learning from the fire brigade before Bonfire Night. Year 6 pupils also spoke very positively about their experience of 'Crucial Crew', where they learned about safety in a variety of situations. Your

innovative approach ensures that safety is of the highest priority for every pupil.

Despite above-average rates of persistent absence, leaders are relentless in following up on pupil absence to ensure that they are aware that each pupil on roll is safe each day.

Inspection findings

- Teaching and learning across key stages and subjects are good. Children in the Nursery listen well and most are able to identify individual letters and link them to sounds. They are encouraged to develop their speech and speak in sentences. Leaders' introduction of 'early talk boost' is helping those children who are more reluctant talkers. The lack of an outdoor space – due to an arson attack – means that there is no effective outdoor provision. However, leaders are resolute in creating many opportunities for outdoor learning despite these limitations. Children in the Reception class were able to talk about their visit to learn about dinosaurs. Leadership and teaching in early years are strong. As a result, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development overall by the end of Reception is broadly in line with the national averages. However, the proportions of children achieving the early learning goals in reading, writing and mathematics – while improving in recent years – remain below national averages.
- There is what you term 'a fluid approach' to Reception and Year 1. You are concerned that some pupils are not ready for the formal structure of Year 1 on a full-time basis, so there is some movement between these classes. The structure of the curriculum enables a more personalised approach so that the needs of individual pupils are met. This has led to improved attainment over time. However, disadvantaged pupils do not make as much progress as their peers by the end of key stage 1.
- Leaders have reviewed and developed the school's strategy for the teaching of reading. This new approach – through your 'senses curriculum' – is having a positive effect on pupils' reading and the development of reading skills. Leaders have successfully enabled teachers to see the teaching of reading in a wider context. Teachers select texts that are appropriate for pupils' ages and provide them with appropriate levels of challenge. Moreover, through your wider curriculum, pupils are given a sense of the experiences behind the words on the page. For example, when reading about exotic food, you give the pupils the opportunity to taste the food. When reading about the Second World War, you give the pupils the opportunity to visit a local history museum, Eden Camp. As a result, pupils' progress in reading continues to improve.
- Teachers plan a range of opportunities for pupils to write. We visited a Year 6 class where the pupils were creating a shadow puppet show. Pupils were extremely enthusiastic about their learning. The lesson skilfully brought together aspects of science, art and English. Pupils were able to explain in detail using scientific vocabulary how and why a shadow puppet might appear to be bigger or smaller to the audience. Their work also showed detailed and imaginative writing. The curriculum is engaging and motivating and there is now scope for pupils to learn in greater depth in subjects across the curriculum. However, too few pupils

achieve the higher standard in writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2.

- During the inspection, pupils spoke very positively about the school and their learning. They talked excitedly about their mathematics, history and topic work. They were also able to talk in depth about their reading and how they learn to read in a variety of different ways. Pupils were particularly positive about 'reciprocal reading' and 'reading for pleasure'. They enjoy taking on the various different roles of leader, questioner, clarifier, predictor and summariser. They say that this helps them to understand the text more deeply.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they improve the provision in the early years so the proportion of children achieving the early learning goals in reading, writing and mathematics increases
- pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are provided consistently with opportunities to enable them to make better progress and to achieve the higher standard in reading and writing by the end of key stage 2
- persistent absenteeism is reduced
- they improve and develop governance so that governors are better able to hold leaders fully to account.

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

Yours sincerely

Daniel Murray
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher and two governors, including the chair of the governing body. I also met with your early years leaders, as well as your deputy headteacher as leader of English. Together with you, we visited classrooms to observe teaching and to look at pupils' work. I also looked in depth at pupils' books and other work. I spoke by telephone with a representative of the local authority. I talked to one of your apprentices. I met with a group of pupils from Years 4 to 6. I listened to 10 pupils read. I also listened informally to pupils read during my visits to lessons. Consideration was given to five free-text responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 30 questionnaire responses from staff. Consideration was also given to 57 responses to Ofsted's pupil

questionnaire. I spoke to parents at the start and end of the school day. I evaluated recent information in relation to pupils' progress throughout the school, the school's self-evaluation document, the school improvement plan and a sample of monitoring records. I also met with you as designated safeguarding leader and reviewed documentation and records about how you keep your pupils safe.