

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Darryl Morgan
Executive Headteacher
Gosden House School
Horsham Road
Bramley
Guildford
Surrey
GU5 0AH

Dear Mr Morgan

Short inspection of Gosden House School

Following my visit to the school on 11 February 2016 with Jenny Boyd, Ofsted Inspector, 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 outstanding in December 2010.

This school continues to be outstanding.

Following the previous inspection, the school's effectiveness went through a period of substantial decline. The previous headteacher and deputy headteacher retired together in August 2013, at which point the local authority rightly identified the need to provide significant support to the school. As part of the local authority's strategy, your services were secured as executive headteacher. You have provided transformational leadership so that provision at the school is now once again outstanding.

You have led with grit, determination and vision from the outset. Your clarity of purpose and skilled leadership has ensured that the staff team now share your high expectations. You have made exceptionally good use of the resources available to you to strengthen the quality of the senior leadership team. For example, leaders from your substantive school, The Ridgeway in Farnham, which is an outstanding teaching school, have worked with leaders at Gosden to share best practice. The result is that all leaders at Gosden now play a vital role in the leadership and management of the school. For example, the head of school is unwaveringly focused on ensuring that the new systems for monitoring and improving teaching are robust and meticulously followed.

Together, you and other leaders, including governors, have successfully embedded a culture of high expectations, while maintaining the warmth and family ethos of

the school. Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is at the core of what you do. It was a pleasure to see how well pupils look after one another and enjoy their learning opportunities together.

The assessment systems you have developed at the school are exceptionally well used by teachers and leaders. Consequently, leaders are able to analyse the progress of the different groups of pupils with authority and precision. Assessment information clearly demonstrates that no groups of pupils are doing less well than others. Overall, the progress made by pupils is often exceptional because of the quality of teaching, the strength of the curriculum in meeting pupils' individual needs, and leaders' effective response to the analysis they undertake of pupils' progress. This demonstrates that the areas for improvement from the previous inspection have been tackled in full.

The overall quality of teaching is of a very high standard. Lessons effectively engage the interest and commitment of pupils. Pupils want to do well and work well together. They are clear about what their learning targets are and strive to do all they can to achieve them. Teachers are adept at using assessment information to plan learning at the level of expectation that is needed.

The pupil premium grant has been used very effectively to meet the individual needs of eligible pupils. This has been instrumental in removing barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils. Consequently, they make good and often exceptional progress from their starting points, and so they are narrowing the gap with their peers.

Middle leadership has been carefully organised and those in post are undertaking a range of activities to support the monitoring and evaluation of the school. However, they are not consistently having an impact on teaching and learning. Leaders, including governors, have rightly identified this as a key next step for the school.

Since the previous inspection, Surrey County Council has made a number of proposals about the future direction of the school. This is yet to be settled and agreed, and so the school is limited in its ability to set the long-term future vision for its services.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are effective. This is because they rightly give it the highest priority. The head of school has diligently ensured that the school's policies, which make appropriate reference to the latest Department for Education guidance, are adhered to. Staff receive relevant training, for example to ensure that all are clear about what to do if they are concerned about the welfare of a pupil. Leaders work effectively with other agencies to ensure that pupils are kept safe and receive the appropriate support they need. Recent improvements to the school site, including the installation of fencing to key areas, have strengthened school security. Appropriate checks are made on staff when they are appointed.

Pupils report that they feel safe. They rightly appreciate the family ethos of the school and regularly do their bit to look after one another. They understand and appreciate the boundaries that have been set for behaviour, which are rarely needed. They rightly believe the adults at the school will sort out problems when they occur. Pupils have been taught how to keep themselves safe in a range of contexts, including when using the internet. For example, their sessions in the forest school help them to understand how to assess risk and avoid injury when working around the fire circle.

Inspection findings

- You have provided dynamic leadership which has resulted in greater urgency, rigour and effectiveness at the school. Ably supported by senior leaders, you have brought about rapid and sustained improvements to teaching and learning. Provision is now carefully tailored to meet the individual needs of pupils. Consequently, they often make exceptional progress.
- Leaders' checks on the quality of teaching and learning are extensive and focused. This means that leaders' evaluations are accurate and plans for improvement are meticulously planned to bring about continuous improvement. Performance management and professional training for staff is carefully dovetailed to leaders' plans. Staff are highly committed to do their best for the pupils. They are skilled and share leaders' vision for continual improvement.
- New initiatives, for example horticultural studies, forest school and the wider opportunities for pupils to gain qualifications in local school and colleges, have all added significant value to the curriculum. They have, along with the improvements made to teaching, helped to ensure that the needs of pupils are met exceptionally well. Equality of opportunity is evident. This is because of the personalised approach within the curriculum which is tailored to the individual needs of the pupils.
- Governors are highly effective. They provide robust support and challenge to school leaders, reflected in the regular and targeted visits that they undertake. They have also worked hard to develop their own effectiveness. The recent reconstitution has allowed them to target their skills carefully for the benefit of the school. The Chair of the Governing Body is a national leader of governance and prudently uses his experiences to reflect on and improve how governance is managed at the school. The governing body has successfully appointed a long-term headteacher who will start at the school in April, despite the ongoing uncertainty about the use of the school by the local authority.
- Lessons capture the imagination and enthusiasm of pupils. This means pupils enjoy their learning and make rapid progress towards their individualised targets. For example, in a Year 9 science lesson, pupils were learning about the properties of gas. They enthusiastically worked together to create a visual representation of how particles behave in solids, liquids and then gases by standing together and acting as particles themselves. They clearly demonstrated an increased understanding of how gas particles move more quickly and freely than in both liquids and solids. The teacher encouraged pupils to use technical vocabulary with accuracy, such as 'vibrate'. The

teacher and other adults made regular reference to pupils' individual targets to help them make the most of the lesson and progress towards their goals.

- Other adults, such as teaching assistants and therapists, make a vital contribution to the progress that pupils make at the school. All staff know pupils exceptionally well and so encourage them to use every opportunity to make progress. Pupils appreciate what the adults in the school do for them. Consequently, pupils' emotional and social needs are particularly well met.
- Assessment systems that have been established at the school mean that leaders meticulously track pupils' progress and their wider achievements. Leaders have successfully engaged teachers in the development of their assessment systems. This means that they have full ownership of the data relating to the pupils and are adept at using assessment information to plan lessons that will meet pupils' individual needs.
- Pupils' learning in lessons and the work in their books reflects the strong progress seen in assessment information. Analysis of pupils' work shows they respond to high expectations, know their personalised targets and receive useful feedback from staff, both orally and in writing, to help them to make better progress.
- Children in the early years have also made exceptional progress from their starting points. As in the rest of the school, positive relationships ensure that children feel safe, are appropriately encouraged and want to succeed. The environment is well developed to capture the interests of the children. They are familiar with the routines of the day and respond well to the guidance they receive from staff about positive behaviour.
- Local authority support has varied widely. Support provided by consultants from Babcock 4S has been highly effective. For example, they helped the governing body secure the services of the appropriately skilled executive headteacher. Simultaneously, they ensured that the school benefited from their highest level of support. Together, they have successfully reversed the decline in standards and ensured that provision has returned to being of the best quality. However, the future direction for the school has not yet been agreed by Surrey County Council. This has limited leaders' ability to set the long-term vision of the school and has also presented extra challenge when recruiting.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- middle leaders consistently have a demonstrable impact on learning
- they establish the long-term vision of the school.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Surrey County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Barnes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, the head of school, the head of secondary and the head of primary, a group of governors including the Chair of the Governing Body, and a group of pupils. I spoke to a consultant from Babcock 4S, who provide school improvement services for the local authority. Inspectors visited seven lessons, all but one accompanied by the head of primary or the head of secondary, to observe teaching and to talk to pupils about what they were learning. Inspectors scrutinised a selection of pupils' work. They considered the responses of 25 parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as responses to the staff and pupil surveys. Inspectors analysed a range of documentation, including reports provided by the local authority, the school's self-evaluation, the improvement plan and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures.