



HALTON LODGE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Tel No: 01928 564053

Headteacher: Mr A Hilldrup

Email: head.haltonlodge@halton.gov.uk

Website: <http://haltonlodge.haltonschools.info/>

NEWSLETTER 14

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As you will be aware, our school was inspected by OfSTED at the start of the school year (in September). This was a routine inspection as our school was last inspected in September 2016 – 5 years ago.

Although OfSTED temporarily suspended their inspection of schools during the pandemic, they returned to inspecting schools in May 2021 (taking into account the impact and adversity caused by the national school closures during this period) then started ‘a full programme of graded school inspections’ at the start of the Autumn Term (September 2021). This meant that we were one of the very first schools to be inspected under the current regime.

Ofsted’s decision to return to inspecting schools “as normal” and to judge them as they would have done had the pandemic not affected or disrupted the education for the children OR limited how much school improvement each school has been able to do during the last 18 months, has been widely criticised.

However, while we would have appreciated greater consideration being given to the extra demands that have been placed on schools during this time - and some acknowledgement of the negative impact that all of the disruption and uncertainty has had on the staff (in terms of their workload and priorities during this time) and the pupils (in respect to their disrupted education and the impact of this) - the inspection team were rightfully impressed by what we feel are the most important aspect of a school at this time:

- the children’s **personal development**,
- the children’s **behaviour and attitudes**,
- the quality of our **Early Years provision**,
- the quality of teaching and learning in **Mathematics**,
- the quality of teaching and learning in **English** (including **phonics** and **reading**).

These are the aspects of the curriculum that we have endeavoured to ensure were of the highest possible standard from the very start of the school year – and it is great that all of these have been recognised as being of a **good** standard. Many being very close to being recognised as ‘outstanding’.

Furthermore, I hope you will feel reassured that no aspects of the school, despite over 40 hours of interrogation and examination, were found to be ‘causing concern’, deemed to be ‘inadequate’, a ‘serious weakness’, or requiring ‘special measures’ to be taken. Equally, the inspection team did not feel that any monitoring visits will be required over the next 2-3 years; as they believe the school continues to have the capacity to improve.

Nevertheless, while the inspection team concluded that the quality of education for English and Mathematics is of a good standard – and ‘the school provides an acceptable standard of education in all other areas’ – they felt that improvements were still needed in our teaching of the foundation subjects, in particular Geography and RE.

For those of you who were able to spend time looking through your child’s work books (and the displays in the corridor) during our recent Parents’ Evening, will be able to make up your own mind as to whether there is such a discrepancy between how we teach English, Mathematics and Science, with those subjects that we currently teach in Topic Weeks (Geography, History, Design Technology and Art Design). However, as stated in the report, our pupils struggle to remember what they have learned – and this was something we were already addressing (as it is one of our school’s key priorities, which was shared with all staff and governors during the school’s first INSET Day – on 1st September); so we will continue to work on developing this throughout the remainder of the school year and ensure the quality of our curriculum continues to improve.

One of the ways that we can increase the rate of improvement and progress of the children at our school is to have strong governance.

We currently have two vacancies on our governing body – one for a parent governor and one for a co-opted governor. When we have vacancies, this places extra pressure on the other members of the governing body – and we would achieve more if we could ‘lighten the load’.

Therefore, if you – or anybody you know – would be interested in joining the governing body at our school, please ask them to contact Mr Hilldrup (so we can explain what the role involves and the level of commitment, and skills, required). If this is something that you would consider, please put yourself forward – it is a role that we would hope you would find very rewarding!

As highlighted in the report, our school has many strengths:

Halton Lodge is a happy and welcoming school. Pupils feel safe and well looked after. They trust staff to do what is right for them. Pupils who spoke to inspectors said that bullying happens from time to time. They said that this does not worry them because staff are really good at sorting problems out.

Pupils behave well. They work hard in lessons. They enjoy the exercise sessions that are held in the hall each morning. Pupils also enjoy the after-school clubs and residential visits that leaders provide.

Children get off to a good start in the early years. The well-planned curriculum helps to ensure that learning is sequential and purposeful. Children quickly learn to follow routines and develop good attitudes to learning. Staff are skilled in modelling behaviour and language. They use assessment strategies effectively to check how well children are progressing across all areas of learning. The early years curriculum ensures that children are well prepared for Year 1.

Staff are committed to supporting pupils' emotional well-being. They provide strong pastoral support for all pupils, including those who attend the specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND. Pupils learn how to be respectful and responsible. They develop good attitudes to learning and behave well, during lessons and at breaktimes.

Pupils develop a strong sense of equality and justice. Older pupils sometimes engage in heated debates about topical issues during lessons, but they are respectful of each other's views. Pupils learn to value difference and see it as a positive aspect of their lives. They enjoy the extra responsibilities that they are given, such as serving on the school council.

Staff use assessment well to identify the needs of pupils with SEND and provide effective support in helping these pupils to work through the reading and mathematics curriculums. Caring and knowledgeable support staff use a wide range of strategies to support the personal development of these pupils.

Leaders have prioritised the teaching of reading. Staff have been well trained to deliver the phonics programme. They ensure that pupils practise their reading regularly at school and at home. They also make sure that the books that pupils read are matched to their reading ability. Teachers use assessment information well to track pupils' reading progress and they are quick to identify any pupils who are falling behind. They support these pupils well and ensure that they develop the confidence and skills that they need to become confident, competent readers.

Leaders have also made improvements to the mathematics curriculum. They have provided training for staff and raised expectations of what pupils can achieve in this subject. This is helping to address a legacy of underperformance in mathematics. Recent teacher assessments have shown that some older pupils still have gaps in their knowledge. However, staff are providing additional support to help them catch up. For younger pupils, the new curriculum is helping to

build a more solid foundation for their learning in mathematics.

Staff are proud to work at Halton Lodge. They feel well supported. They said that leaders are considerate of their workload. Parents and carers are supportive of school leaders and appreciative of the care and support that staff provide for their children each day.

Governors are committed to supporting the school.

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are vigilant and fully aware of the school's policies and procedures for safeguarding pupils. They know how to spot possible signs of abuse. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe. They know that they can speak to a member of staff if they have any concerns or worries. Leaders also work closely with external agencies to provide support for any families who need extra help.

In terms of what the inspection team determined the school needed to do to improve, they have stated:

Curriculum planning for many subjects, other than reading and mathematics, lack detail. They do not help teachers to know precisely what pupils need to learn in order to be ready for the next year group. This stops pupils from knowing and remembering more over time. Leaders need to review the curriculum for these subjects. They should ensure that the planning identifies the key knowledge that pupils must know and the order in which they will learn this content.

Some subject leaders do not have the skills or expertise to fulfil their roles effectively. This means that subject curriculums are not improving and staff are not receiving appropriate training or support. Senior leaders need to provide better support for subject leaders so that they are able to contribute to the development of well-sequenced curriculums.

Senior leaders do not have a good enough understanding of how well pupils are gaining essential knowledge as they learn the curriculum. They need to ensure that appropriate checks are made on how well pupils are developing the knowledge that they need in each subject.

Governors are not aware of the weaknesses in the school's curriculum. They have not held leaders to account for the quality of education that the school is providing. This has contributed to the weaknesses in leadership at the school. Governors need support in developing their knowledge and understanding of the school's curriculum to ensure that they remain well informed about the progress that leaders are making in improving the quality of education.

For those who would like to read the report in full, a copy has been sent to you alongside this newsletter. This will also be published on the OfSTED website later this week.