

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



2 February 2018

Ms Maria Lewington
Headteacher
John Scurr Primary School
Cephas Street
Stepney
London
E1 4AX

Dear Ms Lewington

Short inspection of John Scurr Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 23 January 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 April 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

You provide strong, confident leadership, supported by your senior team and other leaders in the school. Your vision for the school has the support of the governors and the overwhelming majority of staff and parents. The responses to the Ofsted and school questionnaires confirmed this. One parent's comment, 'This is a fantastic school', sums up how many others feel about the result of your work. You have identified the right priorities for the school and acted on them with vigour.

Since the previous inspection, you have restructured the leadership team to provide clarity about the purpose of each role and used support from the local authority to develop leaders' skills. This has resulted in middle leaders implementing change more effectively to improve the educational experience for pupils. For example, pupils appreciate the range of strategies to enrich the reading curriculum, including the 'Millionaire Readers' competition and 'must-read' novels. You have established priorities to develop pupils' reading skills across the school and these are beginning to strengthen pupils' progress. Nevertheless, you recognise that the improvements in middle leadership are not yet fully embedded in all curriculum areas.

Leaders have established strong systems to evaluate accurately the quality of teaching. They have a well-informed picture of where practice is particularly effective as well as areas that they wish to develop further. Leaders support teachers in using information about pupils' progress to inform lesson planning and

ensure that activities match pupils' needs and interests. The teaching of writing is particularly effective. This is evident from the very strong progress of pupils from all starting points, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Leaders have now turned their focus to transferring what has worked well in the teaching of writing to other aspects of pupils' learning. For example, they are rightly prioritising the development of pupils' resilience and stamina in reading so that their progress matches that found in writing.

Governors acknowledge that your ambition to develop an excellent climate for learning in the school is impressive. As a result, pupils are increasingly confident that they will be successful learners. Pupils' confidence is underpinned by the strong relationships between them and the adults in school. These relationships enable pupils to rise to the increased level of challenge that teachers are providing. Pupils are keen to share their achievements and are proud of their school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils report that they feel safe in school. They say that staff are approachable if there is something that bothers them that needs to be shared. This is as a result of the leadership team ensuring that all safeguarding arrangements are robust, fit for purpose, and records are suitably detailed. You, together with your staff and governors, ensure that the safety and well-being of pupils is a priority. Staff follow the school's systems and processes carefully to support pupils' welfare.

Staff and governors are clear about their roles, and work effectively with parents and carers and external agencies to safeguard pupils. Staff have received appropriate information and training informed by statutory guidance. Pupils' attendance is in line with national averages and leaders have put additional systems in place to ensure that any absence is followed up. Leaders acknowledge that there remains work to do to ensure that the progress of some pupils is not hampered by high rates of absence.

Inspection findings

- We agreed to evaluate the impact of leaders' actions to ensure that the progress of the most able pupils in reading matches the progress in writing at key stage 2. In 2017, progress in writing was significantly stronger than in reading. The proportion of most-able pupils attaining the higher standard in reading was below that of their peers nationally. The school's self-evaluation rightly has this as a key area for development.
- You and your team share a vision to create a love of reading in all pupils, including the most able, in order to develop their skills further. There is a shared understanding among leaders that the key to developing these skills is linked to the quality of teaching rather than an over-reliance on intervention or catch-up sessions. Leaders have created a training programme for staff to enhance their ability to challenge and improve pupils' learning. Although this work is having a

positive impact, it will take to time to become fully embedded in school routines and secure sustained improvements in pupils' outcomes across the school.

- Pupils' enthusiasm for reading was evident in the classes we visited and in their comments during the inspection. School assessment information indicates that the current Year 6 pupils have made strong gains in their reading skills, with a high proportion working at the standard expected for their age.
- We also agreed to explore how pupils' learning in other subjects contributed to the improvement of their reading skills. I focused in particular on middle-attaining pupils in key stage 1. This was because those pupils made less progress at the end of key stage 1 in 2017 than pupils from other starting points.
- You have developed the skills of middle leaders since the last inspection. They described how new approaches to planning have brought a greater coherence to the curriculum. This supports the consistent development of pupils' reading skills across different subjects. This consistency was evident in classroom displays, for example, with key concepts explained and illustrated for pupils. School assessment information shows that pupils in key stage 1, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who have SEN and/or disabilities, are making stronger progress in reading compared with this time last year.
- We then agreed to look at the impact of actions taken to improve the attendance of those pupils who are absent from school too often. We did this because the proportion of pupils that was persistently absent was above the national average in 2017. Leaders are clear of the importance of ensuring good attendance, not least because of the links with safeguarding pupils effectively.
- Resources are targeted at improving attendance, including the appointment of new members of the pastoral team to oversee and improve attendance. As a result, the school has established more positive relationships with families experiencing difficult circumstances. Examples include creating a football team for parents and offering English language classes. Current school information shows that overall attendance remains at the national average. However, the number of pupils who are persistently absent is higher than at this time last year. Leaders have analysed the reasons for this carefully and identified that an unusually high number of the youngest pupils were absent due to short-term illness at the end of the autumn term. Prior to this, rates of persistent absence were in line with the school figure for 2017.
- Leaders have rightly confirmed that reducing the levels of persistent absence remains a priority for the school. Leaders know they must check that actions taken to reduce absence are followed through with the same degree of urgency as that found in other areas of the school.
- Finally, we agreed to assess how effectively leaders have acted to improve pupils' outcomes in phonics at the end of Year 1. This was because the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check was significantly below the national average in 2017.
- Alongside the explicit teaching of phonics, pupils benefit from well-targeted additional support to ensure that they make good gains in their phonics skills and knowledge. Pupils at risk of falling behind take part in an online programme to

practise their skills. This is enhanced with further one-to-one support to ensure that they catch up. As a result, school assessment information suggests that the majority of Year 1 pupils are developing the phonics skills expected for their age. Equally, in putting in place this support, leaders have responded effectively to pupils' needs, particularly those who have SEN and/or disabilities in Year 2. You and your team plan to continue this support into Year 3 to ensure that pupils' phonics knowledge is secure and they develop the skills required to read fluently and confidently.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the new approach to developing pupils' reading skills is consistent across the school so that all pupils, particularly the most able, make substantial gains in their learning
- the attendance of those pupils who are persistently absent is tracked rigorously so that swift intervention leads to improved attendance.

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

Yours sincerely

David Boyle
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, senior and middle leaders including those responsible for safeguarding to discuss the work of the school. I also held separate meetings with representatives of the governing body and from the local authority. I held informal conversations with pupils and staff. I visited 10 classes jointly with you, across all key stages. I analysed a range of documentation, including: the school's self-evaluation and aspects of the development plan; assessment and attendance information; safeguarding information; and school policies and procedures. I checked the information on the school's website. I considered the views of 25 parents who replied to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as the views of 27 staff who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire.