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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Miss Mary Li
Headteacher
Hackney New School
317–319 Kingsland Road
Hackney
E8 4DL

Dear Miss Li

Short inspection of Hackney New School

Following my visit to the school on 20 June 2018 with Mark Phillips HMI, 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 June 2015.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection.

There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.

The school has undergone considerable turbulence since the last inspection, including two changes of permanent headteacher. You have been in post since April 2018. You recognise that the school faces some challenges, and have made a resolute start to resolve them. The introduction of the new behaviour policy was in immediate response to what staff, parents and carers, and pupils all recognise was a poor situation. All say that you have already made a difference, and this is borne out by evidence seen by inspectors. You are also undertaking a curriculum review in key stage 3. The governing trust includes significant expertise including in education and music. Governors know, from experience, how to create outstanding schools.

Leaders' self-evaluation of the school's performance is inaccurate. Evidence from this inspection suggests that the school may be declining. This includes an uneven quality of teaching that is hindering pupils' progress. Below-average attendance is also having a negative effect on progress. You have plans to address this through the appointment of a new attendance officer and through external support. Similarly, you have instigated a review of the curriculum to see how this aspect of the school's work could be improved.

Safeguarding is effective.

All necessary staff personnel checks have been carried out, and records of these checks are appropriately maintained. Leaders have ensured that the relevant safeguarding policies and procedures are in place. Staff have received regular training on all safeguarding issues.

All pupils said they felt safe. They said bullying was dealt with effectively. Leaders are well aware of the challenging social and safety challenges in the school's locality. Pupils are taught to be safe through assemblies, personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, and through visiting speakers and theatre groups.

The majority of staff and parents said that pupils were safe in school. However, a number from each group raised concerns about specific incidents. We followed these up by talking to you, the designated safeguarding lead and governors. We also looked carefully at the school's records of these incidents. We were satisfied that leaders and governors had good knowledge of the issues, and that appropriate action has been taken. This includes making referrals to outside agencies. Nevertheless, we also found that the management of records about these cases was inconsistent. Actions taken were not always recorded in a timely way. This is an important area for the improvement of leadership and management.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, three key lines of enquiry were agreed. The first of these was the progress of pupils, including at key stage 4. This was because, at the time of the last inspection, the school only taught key stage 3 pupils.
- Due to public and mock examinations, it was not possible to visit any key stage 4 classes to observe teaching and learning. Assessment information provided by leaders shows that they are expecting the current Year 11 cohort to make good progress in their GCSE examinations.
- Learning observed in key stage 3 lessons presented a less convincing picture of good progress. Teaching seen demonstrated good subject knowledge and clear explanation. Better teaching in mathematics and geography leads to good pupil engagement. Appropriate use is made of technology to record pupils' work in music. However, work produced by pupils across the curriculum in their books and in practical tasks is of variable quality. While some pupils take care and show pride in their work, other books show unfinished or poorly presented tasks. This is not always challenged effectively. In music, while Year 9 pupils were seen working cooperatively and creatively learning chord patterns, the range of harmonies employed was limited.
- The second key line of enquiry was attendance and behaviour. This was identified because of the school's above-average absence rates and the school's recognition that there have been some behavioural issues since the last inspection.

- On appointment as headteacher, you met personally with a number of pupils and their families where behaviour and/or attendance problems were known. Inspectors were told that this has made a positive difference. Pupils and staff said that, prior to your appointment, behaviour had been a serious issue – one described it as 'chaotic' – but all agreed that it has improved. The new behaviour policy, although not yet consistently applied by all staff, appears to have made expectations and boundaries clearer.
- During the inspection, pupils moved around the school in a calm and orderly manner. They were polite and friendly. In lessons, we saw no incidents of poor behaviour. Pupils were consistently compliant. However, there was some evidence of limited enthusiasm for learning in classrooms. This reflects the lack of pride shown in the presentation of pupils' work.
- During the inspection, we saw a small amount of obscene graffiti in two areas of the school building. On investigation, it was clear that this is not recent and no such graffiti was seen, for example, in pupils' books. The new behaviour policy makes very clear that this behaviour is unacceptable. Nevertheless, it is also unacceptable that the graffiti had not been noticed and removed by leaders.
- We agree with you and your leaders that the persistent absence of a few pupils, particularly in key stage 4, has an adverse effect on their progress. Leaders have reviewed the way that attendance is managed, and you are appointing a new attendance officer from September 2018.
- The third area of focus was the role of creative arts and enrichment activities in pupils' development. Since the school was founded, a special focus has been music education. Time allocation for music in key stage 3 is generous and, as a result, numbers opting for courses in key stage 4 have been high. Similarly, when the school was founded, a multitude of enrichment opportunities were provided beyond the regular school timetable.
- Over time and particularly since September 2017, the school's growth and changes in leadership have reduced the quantity of enrichment activities on offer. Older pupils commented on the more limited opportunities they have, particularly in technology. Staff also commented negatively about changes to curriculum time and enrichment activities. All this suggests a decline in the quality of the good provision reported at the last inspection. You have recognised this and, with the support of governors, have rightly instigated a curriculum review. This includes consideration of the extent to which the curriculum develops pupils' deep knowledge base across the full range of subjects.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- safeguarding records are completed in an appropriately detailed manner
- teaching across the curriculum provides consistently high expectations of the presentation and completion of work and of the quality of subject knowledge acquired by pupils

- attendance is improved so that it is at least in line with the national average
- the curriculum review is completed and implemented so that pupils enjoy a broader, richer and deeper learning experience.

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

Yours sincerely

Stephen Adamson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

We observed lessons, looked at work and had discussions with pupils. We also looked at school documentation, including behaviour and exclusion records as well as attendance figures. We met with representatives from the governing body. In addition, we considered responses to the staff survey and pupil survey, and the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents.