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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Helen Seeley
Head of School
Priory Fields School
Astor Avenue
Dover
Kent
CT17 0FS

Dear Mrs Seeley

Short inspection of Priory Fields School

Following my visit to the school on 20 November 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Leaders, governors and trustees of The Whinless Down Academy Trust work effectively together for the benefit of all pupils. Together, your high expectations, aspiration and clear vision ensure that pupils receive strong academic support and their well-being is looked after closely. One parent, echoing the views of many, commented, 'Leaders and staff seek to give all children the best life experiences and the children's well-being is of paramount importance.'

Staff understand and share your ambitious vision. They value the opportunities they are given to develop their professional skills, both across the trust and more widely. Staff morale is high. Throughout the school, there is a strong sense of common purpose and drive to improve.

You and your senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. You have carefully identified your school improvement priorities for this year, and the positive impact of your actions can already be seen. The high number of children who speak English as an additional language, many of whom join the school at different times, settle in quickly and make good progress. You and your other leaders have managed the recent move into the new school building well, ensuring that pupils' learning has continued uninterrupted.

Parents and carers are happy with their children's education. All parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and parents spoken to during the inspection, talked positively about their children's progress and school experience. Parents feel that their children are 'thriving' and 'flourishing'. They appreciate that any concerns they may have are dealt with promptly and say that communication between home and school is effective.

Pupils are settled and happy in school. They are rightly proud of their improved school building. They learn in a calm and well-structured environment where routines are securely established. Pupils move around the school in an orderly manner, showing politeness at all times. They relish the many opportunities they are given to contribute responsibly to the life of the school. For example, pupils aspire to be head boy or head girl, sports ambassadors, and members of the very active school council. Pupils enjoy supporting each other as 'maths buddies' or 'English buddies' in their lessons. Pupils understand each other's differences and their many different cultures and are clear that, 'everyone accepts each other.'

Your work to improve pupils' attendance is highly effective and impressive. You have a deep understanding of the barriers to pupils attending school regularly. Your well-considered work with families to help parents understand the importance of their children's education is effective. Pupils greatly value the 'merit' scheme you have implemented, which includes rewards for behaviour, attendance, punctuality and uniform. As a result, attendance overall rose last year from the previous year, but you are not complacent, and recognise the need to continue this work with the same pace and tenacity.

At the time of the previous inspection, you were asked to make sure that pupils made good progress in writing and to improve teachers' subject knowledge across different areas of the curriculum. Provisional information for 2018 shows that progress in writing at the end of key stage 2 was above the national average. The information also indicates that the proportion of pupils who attained age-related expectations in writing at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2 is above that found nationally in the previous year. Work in pupils' books shows that they have opportunities to write at length in a variety of subjects. Further attention is needed to improve the presentation and handwriting of some pupils. Your continuing professional development programme for staff contributes to developing their subject knowledge. This is seen in the successful work with support staff to develop their knowledge of grammar, punctuation and spelling. Specialist staff for sport and music make a good contribution to the development of teachers' skills in those areas.

Safeguarding is effective.

Arrangements to safeguard pupils are effective. Records are diligently maintained. You make sure that all staff receive appropriate training, including in their duty to prevent extremism and radicalisation. Regular meetings ensure that staff are kept up to date with safeguarding information. Staff know pupils very well, so they are alert to any concerns, which they follow up conscientiously and swiftly.

Pupils feel safe in school and have confidence in the staff to help them if there are problems. Pupils show an impressive understanding of how to keep themselves safe online. This is because e-safety is an integral part of the school's curriculum. All of the parents who replied to the online parent questionnaire felt that their children are safe at school. Relationships between staff and families are strong. You are tenacious in ensuring that the right support is made available to the high number of vulnerable pupils and their families.

Governors fully understand their statutory responsibilities. They carefully monitor the systems and processes in place to ensure that pupils are kept safe.

Inspection findings

- The teaching of reading is a top priority across the school. You have galvanised staff and pupils to understand the importance of reading. As a result, teachers ensure that pupils read widely and often. They show an impressive understanding of vocabulary and enjoy reading different authors. For example, one pupil in lower key stage 2 was able to explain eloquently the meaning of the words 'anvil' and 'restless'. Pupils' reading books are well matched to their reading ability and they show strong comprehension skills.
- Disadvantaged pupils make strong progress. They receive highly effective support to help them catch up with others. You and your senior leaders carefully track the progress of this group of pupils and monitor interventions regularly to check their impact. Support staff are well trained and contribute effectively to pupils' learning. Provision for pupils' welfare is a strength of the school. The care and support pupils receive help them make the progress of which they are capable. Provisional results from 2018 show that the attainment of disadvantaged pupils is broadly the same as, or exceeds, that of their peers at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2.
- You are aware that in 2018, some of the most able pupils did not achieve highly enough in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2. This is sensibly a high priority on your school improvement plan. Work in pupils' books shows that teachers increasingly provide work that challenges and deepens pupils' understanding. This is particularly evident in mathematics, where pupils regularly apply their reasoning and problem-solving skills. Teachers' feedback usually meets leaders' expectations, encouraging pupils to think more deeply about their work. You recognise that there is less evidence of challenge in pupils' work in science or in subjects other than English and mathematics.
- The curriculum provides many exciting opportunities to enliven learning. These include studying interesting topics and making links to high-quality texts. Pupils go on valuable trips that support their learning, such as visits to local museums and sites of historical interest. Pupils take part in many sporting competitions and enjoy exciting outdoor activities such as sailing. Music plays an important part in school life. Pupils enjoy learning music and are offered the opportunity to learn an instrument, sing in a choir or take part in the school's active orchestra.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching challenges pupils, in all subjects, in order to increase the proportion of pupils attaining higher standards at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2
- pupils take pride in all aspects of their work, including their handwriting.

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

Yours sincerely

Frances Nation
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the executive headteacher, assistant headteacher and a member of support staff. I met with four members of the local governing body and two representatives from The Whinless Down Academy Trust. Together, you and I visited classes in all year groups. I considered 10 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including six free-text comments. I also spoke directly to some parents. I considered 16 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. I met with a group of pupils from key stages 1 and 2 and heard them read. I talked to pupils informally about their learning and scrutinised work in pupils' books. I analysed a range of documentation, including information about safeguarding and your evaluation of the school's effectiveness.