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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Lee Smith
Headteacher
The Holy Brook School
145 Ashampstead Road
Southcote
Reading
Berkshire
RG30 3LJ

Dear Mr Smith

Short inspection of The Holy Brook School

Following my visit to the school on 8 March 2019 with Mark Bagust, 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 good in October 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 lead a skilful staff team that puts pupils' learning, development and well-being at the centre of all that is done. Pupils typically join your school after having experienced difficulties in their earlier school placements. The vast majority of them settle quickly to make strong progress. Parents praise the noticeable changes that they see in their children. They told inspectors that, at Holy Brook School, their children feel valued and appreciated. Their children become interested in learning and talk in positive terms about what they have done during the school day. For parents, this is a welcome change from their former experience.

Pupils told inspectors that they enjoy the wide variety of subjects that they learn and recognise that they are making progress. As pupils deepen their experience of being in the school, they understand your expectations and the emphasis on showing respect for others. Pupils appreciate the ways in which staff keep them safe and carefully talk them through difficult situations.

Inspectors identified many strengths when the school was last inspected, such as leaders' clear aims for the school. They noted the good quality of teaching and learning, pupils' high levels of attendance and good achievement. These remain strong features of your provision. Inspectors previously asked you to make further improvements to teaching and learning, school improvement planning and the ways in which staff record behavioural incidents. You have addressed these areas diligently and with success, although there have been some barriers to the further

improvement of the quality of teaching and learning. The school has been through some recent and ongoing turbulence with staffing. Currently, all senior leaders have taken on a full-time teaching role to ensure that pupils' needs continue to be well met.

You have taken particular care to improve the reporting of behaviour incidents. Pupils' behaviour remains well managed. All incidents are meticulously recorded and followed up with adults and pupils. Leaders train all new staff to understand that pupils communicate their feelings through their behaviour. A comprehensive risk assessment is in place for every pupil, which identifies specific strategies to support their behaviour. Staff adapt plans regularly to ensure that they are helpful and up to date.

Staff are alert to pupils' emotional needs and moods and help pupils to make good choices in their behaviour. The school day is organised so that pupils are busy with interesting things to do, including during breaktimes and at lunchtime. You also teach pupils how to benefit from calm, quiet times. Clear policies and procedures support staff to use consistent approaches when de-escalating incidents at the earliest possible stage. This keeps everyone safe and maintains a calm atmosphere throughout the school. Specialist training supports all staff to manage serious incidents safely. A new system of electronic recording is helping leaders to analyse information about pupils' behaviour quickly and to respond quickly to any trends.

Pupils learn to build strong relationships with each other well, which inspectors observed during the weekly celebration assembly. It was evident that many pupils feel proud of their achievements. Displays in classrooms and corridors reflect the high standards that many of your pupils reach.

In spite of the governing body's many efforts to recruit to their team, they are currently few in number. The chair of governors, in particular, knows the school very well. Governors appreciate the information that you provide but they do not use it sharply enough to hold you and your leaders to account.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have created a school where all staff have an in-depth understanding of their responsibilities to keep pupils safe. You are one of the three designated leads for safeguarding and, as a team, you ensure that all procedures are fit for purpose. All staff are thoroughly trained as soon as they join the school, and this is revisited at the start of each school year. Daily briefing sessions help staff to be regularly updated and to share relevant information. You help pupils to understand how to keep safe when they are on the internet and you promote their understanding of British values to reduce the risk of radicalisation.

Staff record any safeguarding concerns on the school's electronic system and the designated safeguarding leads follow these through diligently, making decisions about referrals to other agencies, where needed. The single central record of recruitment checks, on all adults who work with pupils, is carefully maintained.

Governors have attended relevant training to understand their role in safeguarding. Pupils learn how to make safe choices and parents have no concerns about their children's safety when they are at school.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection we examined how well you have continued to improve the school's effectiveness, focusing particularly on the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and the most able. We looked at how the curriculum supports all pupils' academic progress and personal development.
- Almost all pupils, including the very high proportion of disadvantaged pupils, make strong progress from their starting points on admission to the school, taking account of their individual circumstances and needs. Pupils' progress tends to strengthen once they settle fully into the school. Where pupils' progress is less than leaders expect, there are usually specific circumstances or additional special educational needs.
- Inspectors saw that the most able pupils make strong progress from their starting points. They worked with concentration and independence. In a mathematics lesson, the most able pupils practised multiplication fluency by completing calculations using the grid method. Due to the nature of their needs, this group find it difficult to apply their number skills to solve problems. Similarly, in reading, the most able find some of the comprehension skills hard to grasp and in writing, they find it a challenge to present their own ideas. In spite of this, the most able pupils have used well-structured sentences and carefully selected vocabulary to write thoughtful 'magic box' poems. Leaders have identified the need for the most able pupils to develop the confidence to use their English and mathematics skills more creatively.
- Teachers have developed portfolios for each pupil, containing examples of work, detailed assessments and other information about their progress. You make effective use of pupils' 'progress points' in reading, writing and mathematics to understand the school's performance. As a result, there is a wealth of information about pupils' academic progress and their personal development. Your analysis helps to raise expectations of what pupils can achieve, across the school. However, leaders and governors do not use this information to evaluate precisely the impact of improvements to teaching, learning and the curriculum on pupils' outcomes.
- Senior leaders have designed the curriculum to nurture pupils and ignite their interests. You have made the focus on pupils' basic skills in language, literacy and numeracy a priority. Effective use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils provides therapies, particularly art and music, and also enables visits to the 'woodland school'. These opportunities are planned to develop pupils' resilience, fostering their skills to self-regulate their emotions and behaviours.
- Teachers provide a variety of activities across the different subjects, often linked by topics. Pupils find most of their learning interesting, especially when subjects are practical and tasks are relevant and inspiring.
- Pupils join your school at different ages. They usually start by learning about the world that immediately surrounds them and then move on to consider the wider

world. The curriculum is delivered differently in each of the four mixed-age classes to suit the abilities and learning needs of each group of pupils. The youngest pupils are nurtured to learn through play and experience. They use practical resources to develop their basic skills.

- During our learning walk, we saw adult-led role-play that helped a small group of younger pupils to communicate. They concentrated for an extended period of time. Throughout the school, staff were often skilful in promoting pupils' speaking and listening, and immersing them in their learning activities. Older pupils showed greater concentration and could recall what they had previously learned. They learned through a careful balance of independence, challenge and support.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- information about pupils' learning and personal development is used sharply to further improve the quality of provision
- governance improves so that governors hold leaders to account for their actions to improve 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 Reading. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Linda Jacobs
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, the deputy headteacher and a group of staff. We talked to several parents and pupils. The lead inspector talked to the chair of the governing body and one other governor, and had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. Inspectors visited all classrooms, accompanied by a senior leader. We observed pupils' behaviour throughout the day, including in lessons, during lunchtime and in the playground.

We considered the responses of two parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and received five responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. Inspectors analysed a range of documentation, including: leaders' evaluations of the school's performance; the school's improvement plan; minutes of the governing body's meetings; information about pupils' progress; and safeguarding procedures and records. Inspectors also scrutinised some of the pupils' work and assessment information in their portfolios.