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Miss Jane Dennis
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Dennis

Short inspection of Seymour Road Academy

Following my visit to the school on 12 March 2019, 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. Leaders have been true to their aims and ambitions, which has strengthened the curriculum and improved pupils' outcomes. All staff promote the values enshrined in their RESPECT (resilience, empathy, self-awareness, positivity, excellence, communication and teamwork) curriculum and pupils recognise these characteristics in themselves and others. Pupils' well-being and the way in which they are nurtured and supported are at the heart of what this school is about. Parents, carers, staff and pupils agree that this is a happy place to be. Staff praise you and the executive headteacher for your consideration for their well-being.

Leaders have not compromised on academic expectations. Some high-quality teaching has led to good outcomes for pupils, especially in English and mathematics at the end of all key stages. Leaders have tackled the areas for improvement cited at the last inspection. The quality of teaching and learning is now at least consistently good in all year groups. The trust has promoted a holistic approach to teaching and learning through the RESPECT curriculum, which has secured improvements and sustained engagement by pupils, especially boys. Leaders are now improving the curriculum even further to ensure that pupils have more opportunities to work at a higher standard in a range of subjects, just as they do in English and mathematics. Leaders provide regular and valuable feedback to teachers, which has improved their practice. Training and development activities across the trust's schools to share good practice have further strengthened the quality of teaching. The appointment of a very experienced writing moderator has led to significant improvements in pupils' writing. The school has also successfully

strengthened the Year 1 provision, which has secured pupils' good progress from the end of early years.

A key to the success of the school is that all staff are keenly aware of pupils' needs and they model the behaviour they expect on a daily basis. As a result, the learning environment is purposeful and engaging. Pupils praise the staff for the support they receive. Relationships between pupils are harmonious. Bullying is rare. The school is made up from a wide range of pupils from different backgrounds and cultures. This feature has enriched the school community and encouraged inclusion. Being different is no barrier to being accepted at Seymour Road Academy.

Governors and the trust have made astute recruitment choices to strengthen leadership. The principal and executive headteacher work seamlessly together to support the continuous improvements in the school. Governors have encouraged parental engagement through the recruitment of a family worker and a school counsellor. Consequently, parents are highly loyal and supportive of the school. Some parents choose to take two buses to school rather than attend a school nearer to their homes.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders have ensured that a safeguarding culture permeates the school. Staff, including governors, are trained well to understand the signs and symptoms of abuse. In addition, all teachers have undertaken 'Prevent' duty training and understand the possible risks in relation to extremism. Staff induction is thorough.

Leaders keep accurate and detailed records about all pupils at every level of concern. Staff follow up on all concerns and engage a range of external professional agencies to support pupils and their families. The school counsellor has been very effective in supporting pupils' mental and emotional health.

The curriculum is carefully planned to help pupils keep safe. Pupils understand the dangers of using the internet, especially when using online games and social media. Pupils, including children in the early years, are helped to recognise healthy and unhealthy relationships in an age-appropriate way. All pupils and parents spoken with and those who responded to the online and school surveys say that pupils are safe. Pupils are fully aware of how to report a concern or a worry in and out of school.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I focused on some key lines of enquiry. First, I wanted to know if leaders had sustained the improvements in pupils' outcomes in English across key stage 2. This is because the published information suggested recent improvements in reading and writing, while outcomes in mathematics remained consistently strong. Pupils' attainment in all year groups continues to improve, including the proportion exceeding the expected standard for their age. Pupils

make good progress from their starting points. Specific work to strengthen their skills in reading and writing continues to make a difference. Pupils engage in a wide variety of writing and develop their skills well. Pupils in each year group use a wide range of vocabulary, descriptive language and punctuation to improve their writing. The most able pupils are stretched well through 'challenge tasks'.

- A culture of reading is widely promoted across the school. All pupils have a 'reading for pleasure' book. Most pupils develop their comprehension skills well, but in a couple of classes the teaching approach is not consistently effective. This is because the most able pupils are not challenged to work things out for themselves and deepen their understanding. In addition, the least able cannot always grasp what it is they are trying to find out or learn from the text they read. Pupils' progress in English in these classes is not consistently strong.
- Another line of enquiry was about boys' performance, which in many subjects at the end of the key stages fell below that of girls. An innovative approach to curriculum development and planning has led to high levels of engagement, especially among boys. The RESPECT curriculum and the contribution of Commando Joe's are highly valued and effective. These ex-army recruits are trained extremely well into the 'Seymour Road way' and they effectively support in and out of the classroom. Boys, in particular, rise to the challenges of their 'missions' and look up to their positive role models.
- The curriculum has also been reviewed to ensure that the choices of texts and themes appeal to boys. For example, the themes of dinosaurs and gladiators have captured boys' imagination to research facts and information around these subjects. In the early years, boys are equally as engaged in their play, early phonics and writing as the girls. The difference between boys' achievement and girls' is diminishing across the school. Where it is not, the boys have specific additional needs which affect their relative performance.
- I also investigated how effectively leaders were using the pupil premium funding to improve the progress and attendance of disadvantaged pupils. The plans are well conceived and thoroughly evaluated. Governors keep a close eye on how well government funding is spent. Many disadvantaged pupils are boys, so they have benefited from the improvement in the curriculum. The school's family worker and counsellor have helped many pupils, especially boys, to attend school more and improve their basic skills. The progress of disadvantaged pupils is prioritised, as they make up the majority of the pupils on roll. Current information about these pupils' achievements suggests that their attainment is increasing and they make good progress. In some subjects, such as mathematics, they outperform girls.
- I also wanted to confirm the school's work to strengthen the Year 1 curriculum, a weakness cited at the time of the last inspection. Much work has gone into changing the provision and strengthening teaching to help pupils who fall below age-related expectations. A new outdoor provision has developed pupils' basic skills extremely well, including their phonic knowledge. Teaching assistants work in a play environment to help pupils to read, write and understand basic number facts. The expectations of the most able are high in Year 1. Their writing is increasingly fluent and accurate. Pupils try to expand their vocabulary and use a

range of descriptive language to liven up their writing, including using metaphors and similes. Pupils make good progress in Year 1.

- Pupils' attendance has improved but I wanted to check if the overall figures masked poorer attendance by boys and disadvantaged pupils. I wished to investigate if work to improve attendance was making a difference. The school's family worker has developed strong relationships with a number of families, including holding meetings and workshops. Also, the work of the school counsellor and regular home visits have encouraged more pupils who had previously high rates of absence to attend regularly. A minority of pupils, however, with persistent high absence or lateness to school are not making the progress they should. The school is in the early stages of devising new strategies to limit the impact of pupils' absences and poor punctuality on their progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- opportunities for pupils to work at a higher standard are equally as strong across all subjects in key stage 2
- the teaching strategies to improve pupils' comprehension skills are as strong as the best in key stage 2
- the new strategies to improve the attendance and punctuality of a small minority of disadvantaged pupils help to limit the impact on their progress.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Manchester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Zarina Connolly
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, the executive principal, senior leaders, the subject leaders for English and attendance managers. I also met staff responsible for maintaining the single central register, the designated safeguarding leader, the trust's inclusion leader and the leaders for the use of the pupil premium funding. I spoke on the telephone with the local authority quality assurance adviser. I met with the chair of the governing body, the chief executive officer and the finance officer for the Wise Owl Trust. With you and the executive principal, I observed learning in all classes, during which I examined a range of pupils' workbooks. I spoke with a group of pupils from key stage 2. I spoke with parents and carers at the school gates in the morning. There were too few responses to Ofsted's online

questionnaire, Parent View, to take into account but I took account of nine free-text responses. I took account of the 33 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and 117 responses to the pupil survey. I looked at a range of school documents, including: information about pupils' achievement; the school's self-evaluation; the school improvement plan; information related to the monitoring of teaching, the curriculum and external reviews carried out by an adviser; and documents relating to safeguarding and attendance.