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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Katharine Davies
Headteacher
Poplar Primary School
Poplar Road South
Merton Park
London
SW19 3JZ

Dear Mrs Davies

Short inspection of Poplar Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 8 May 2019 with Ofsted Inspector Jacques Szemalikowski, 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 July 2015.

This school continues to be good.

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

Your joint evaluation of the strengths of the school is accurate, and you are addressing areas for development. Together, you and your leaders devise effective actions to implement your plans. This impacts positively on pupils' outcomes.

Following the last inspection, leaders were advised to develop middle leaders' roles in monitoring their areas of responsibility. In response to this, you trained and empowered your middle leaders. You have ensured that they are clear about their accountability for the subject area they lead. As a result, middle leaders have secured improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. Leaders were also challenged to raise attainment in mathematics by ensuring that there is sufficient challenge for children in the early years. You have addressed this effectively and there are now more children in the early years who exceed the early learning goals in mathematics than previously.

Pupils are polite, courteous and very welcoming. They talked confidently about the many learning experiences they enjoy and engage in, in and out of classrooms. Pupils take pride in contributing to school life and are appreciative of how school leaders take their views into account. Parents and carers support this and typically commented: 'At Poplar, you definitely get the sense that the school is the focal point of a wider and mixed community.'

Governors have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school.

They offer leaders sharp and timely challenge. They are committed to securing improvements to ensure that pupils make strong progress in their learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, governors and staff work effectively together to ensure that the school has robust safeguarding arrangements. There is a culture of vigilance at the school, and detailed records are carefully maintained. Leaders ensure that all staff have appropriate and up-to-date training so that they can spot and deal with any problems quickly. Leaders work effectively with external agencies, challenging them where necessary, to ensure that timely and appropriate support is sourced for vulnerable pupils.

Pupils are confident that they are safe and know who to turn to if they have any concerns. They trust that adults and other pupils will support them if they have any worries or when they are hurt. They know how to keep themselves safe at home, at school and online. Leaders have ensured that the curriculum provides many opportunities for pupils to learn about e-safety, including how to deal with cyber bullying. Pupils say that bullying at school is rare and that, if it happens, adults deal with it promptly and effectively.

Inspection findings

- During our initial discussion, we agreed to look at writing as a key line of enquiry. This was because, in the past two years, progress pupils made in writing was not as strong as in other subjects. Consequently, leaders have identified pupils' progress in writing as a priority for improvement.
- In key stage 1, pupils have plenty of opportunities to develop their writing skills. They receive timely and effective support from adults to improve and make strong progress over time. Teachers ensure that pupils acquire the necessary knowledge and skills in their spelling, punctuation and grammar to achieve well in this subject. However, pupils do not routinely use and apply their spelling and punctuation skills when writing at length in this key stage.
- In key stage 2, pupils write in a range of genres and are becoming more ambitious in their choice of vocabulary. Teachers demand precision in spelling, grammar and punctuation. As a result, more pupils than previously meet the expected standard in writing. However, most-able pupils, particularly most-able disadvantaged pupils, are not challenged sufficiently to enable a higher proportion to achieve greater depth.
- We also identified mathematics as a key line of enquiry. For the past three years, pupils' progress in this subject has been significantly above average. We wanted to explore the reasons for such strong pupils' outcomes. Teachers in key stage 2 have a detailed understanding of the standards required for each area of mathematics. They have received effective guidance on how to support most-able pupils, including most-able disadvantaged pupils. This enables them to achieve greater depth.
- Teachers create plenty of opportunities to deepen pupils' understanding of mathematical concepts. They build on pupils' prior knowledge and ensure that pupils practise and consolidate their skills to achieve mastery in mathematics. Teachers

check that the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, receive appropriate challenge to meet the highest standards. As a result, these pupils demonstrate well-developed reasoning skills. Their work shows that they meet the greater-depth standard.

- Finally, we looked at the wider curriculum. We wanted to see whether pupils achieve as well in other areas of the curriculum as they do in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Leaders have designed and implemented a curriculum which ensures that pupils make strong progress across a variety of subjects. Pupils make strong progress in their historical understanding, for example. Teachers help pupils to develop their ability to study objects and artefacts to establish how people lived in the past. Their understanding of chronology is strong and they are able to place significant events in history. Similarly, pupils achieve well in geography. A well-thought-out geography curriculum allows pupils to develop a good knowledge of places and locations. They can read maps, globes and atlases. Pupils are able to make links between subjects and are able to recall important knowledge they have learned in different topics.
- In art, pupils enjoy opportunities to develop their skills. Their experiences in this subject range from an understanding of primary and secondary colours through to working with various media and textures. Pupils achieve well in physical education. For example, they receive effective support to formulate team strategy. In doing so, pupils use sporting vocabulary fluently.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- in key stage 1, pupils routinely use and apply their spelling and punctuation skills when writing extensively
- in key stage 2, most-able pupils, particularly most-able disadvantaged pupils, are stretched and challenged to enable a higher proportion to achieve greater depth in writing.

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

Yours sincerely

Edison David
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, we discussed the work of the school with you and members of the senior leadership team. We spoke to pupils and discussed their experiences in lessons, the extent to which they feel safe and their views on learning and behaviour. We held discussions with a representative of the local authority. We considered 189 responses to Ofsted's parent survey, 30 responses to the staff survey and 75 responses to the pupil survey. We met with governors, including the two joint chairs of the governing body. We considered documentation provided by the school and information posted on the school's website. We looked at the single central record of staff suitability checks and the school's analysis of pupils' attendance. Together with school leaders, we visited lessons to observe learning and looked at samples of pupils' work across all subjects. We listened to pupils read from across the ability range.