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Dear Miss Jones

Short inspection of Blue Gate Fields Infants' School

Following my visit to the school on 11 June 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 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. You have made sure that the school is a happy and friendly community. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strongly developed. Parents, carers, governors and the wider community value the pastoral support that leaders provide. You ensure that all adults and pupils have a role in the continuing development of the school.

You have developed an effective leadership team that shares your aspirations. Middle leaders work collaboratively to improve the school and are eager to share their plans for curriculum development. Staff know individual pupils and their families well.

Parents commend the work of you and your staff and are very positive about the school. They value your high visibility and presence around the school. Parents and pupils described leaders as 'always approachable', especially if they have any concerns. Parents spoke about the strong sense of community spirit in the school. Strong parental engagement has been a priority for the school in the past few years. Leaders provide a wide range of family workshops to help parents support their child's learning, particularly in early literacy.

Leaders have successfully addressed all the areas in the previous inspection report. Middle leaders now focus on improving the quality of teaching and pupil achievement in core subjects. Improvement plans are clear and detailed, and help the school to make progress in line with the time frames stated in the plan. Persistent absence for all groups of pupils is now below the national average.

Governors ensure that they understand the strengths and key priorities of the school. They are well informed and ask challenging questions of senior leaders. Governors support your endeavor to bring about further improvements to pupils' progress and outcomes.

Pupils are well behaved in lessons and around the school. They are eager to show visitors their work, and take great pride in their school. Pupils are keen to read, and readily discussed their enjoyment of reading and learning. Pupils' behaviour and the promotion of their welfare are strengths of the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are of high quality. You and your safeguarding team make sure that thorough checks are made on all staff to ensure their suitability to work with pupils. The single central record of staff checks is detailed and well maintained.

Training for all staff is regular and up to date. Leaders are aware of safeguarding concerns in the local area. They ensure that the school's work to keep pupils safe takes account of these issues. Your team works effectively with external agencies to ensure that families have access to a wide range of appropriate support services. Pupils told me they feel safe in school. They know to whom they can report any worries or concerns, and are encouraged by staff to share any issues that may be troubling them. Pupils said they value this support. As a result, they also said that bullying rarely occurs, and records confirm this. Year 2 pupils were able to give specific examples of how to stay safe online.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed to look at the provision for reading. Leaders identified the development of reading as being a key priority for the school. In 2017, reading attainment was below the national average by the end of key stage 1, including for disadvantaged pupils.
- You work in close partnership with the local authority and other schools to develop pupils' reading skills. The proportion of pupils that attained the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check has been well above average for the past three years. Systematic phonics teaching now starts in the Nursery Year, and pupils use these skills well in key stage 1. Assessment systems are rigorous and give accurate information to help teachers plan the next steps for pupils' learning. Reading records are maintained to a high standard.
- Current performance information indicates that progress is improving and that levels of attainment in reading are above the national averages. Teachers and support staff have received training and guidance to develop their practice. Nevertheless, further staff training is needed to ensure consistency in the teaching of reading across all classes.
- Leaders are determined to promote an enjoyment and love of reading. This begins

from the moment children enter the Nursery. The early years provision provides an environment which is rich with words, letters and books to foster early learning. The school library is well resourced and is used on a regular basis by all classes. In Years 1 and 2, pupils have access to a wide range of books, and reading resources and texts are well matched to their abilities.

- Pupils in Year 2 that I heard read, talked enthusiastically about reading. They are mostly confident and fluent in their reading. They read challenging texts in many instances, and study texts in detail during lessons. Governors have ensured that the use of pupil premium funding is effective in supporting disadvantaged pupils who require additional support with reading.
- We next agreed to look at the school's work to provide a broad and balanced curriculum. At our first meeting, you told me that establishing richness and variety in the curriculum has been a key priority of the school, particularly in art.
- The curriculum is planned carefully, and provides pupils with the opportunity to explore the full range of national curriculum subjects. Scientific skills are taught well, and pupils' attainment in science is above average. Pupils told me how much they enjoy science and were eager to discuss their learning. They are now able to design simple experiments, make predictions and record their findings in tables.
- Religious education strongly supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, particularly their understanding of other faiths. Pupils' creativity is promoted through art, music and technology. Assessment information shows good progress across a range of subjects. The outcomes were also evident in high-quality displays of pupils' work around the school. These included, for example, African art and culture on display in corridors. Pupils' work demonstrates skills in drawing, sewing and mask-making, using different materials and media. This was also evident in the displays linking the science topic of space to art and design.
- A programme of extra-curricular activities, visitors and visits further enhances the curriculum. Pupils said how much they enjoy the trips they experience, especially visits in the local area.
- However, work in the humanities curriculum, such as in history and geography, is not of the same standard as in other subjects. Presentation of work and coverage of topics are weak. The organisation, content and planning of the humanities curriculum are not strongly planned.
- Finally, we agreed to look at what action leaders are taking to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence in the school. Persistent absence has been high for some years. Leaders have worked in close partnership with parents on this aspect of the school's work. A detailed attendance plan is in place and is proving to be effective.
- Punctuality has greatly improved with the implementation of new procedures in the past few years. Leaders and governors have made parents aware of the importance of regular attendance, and the school has taken decisive action where necessary. A detailed study of records shows a significant reduction in persistent absence over the last academic year. The school is now almost in line with the national average for attendance, but it is ambitious for even further improvement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school reviews its humanities curriculum to increase opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in history and geography
- attendance rates improve so that they are in line with the national averages.

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

Yours sincerely

Sean Flood
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held discussions with you and other senior and middle leaders. I spoke with a representative from the local authority and held a meeting with two governors. I spoke with pupils informally in lessons and around the school. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, on the playground and as they moved around the school. I scrutinised pupils' work in a range of subjects. I heard pupils read and spoke with them about their books. I visited the Nursery and Reception classes, and made visits to all classes, alongside senior leaders. I examined the school's progress information and assessment records. I scrutinised documentation related to safeguarding, welfare and attendance. I spoke to a group of parents at the start of the school day on the playground. I considered the responses of 12 parents to Parent View, and the 15 responses of staff to Ofsted's online survey.