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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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5 July 2019

Ms Geraldine Fitzmaurice
Headteacher
Sir Thomas Abney School
Fairholt Road
Stoke Newington
London
N16 5ED

Dear Ms Fitzmaurice

Short inspection of Sir Thomas Abney School

Following my visit to the school on 26 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.

All leaders have a detailed knowledge of their areas of responsibility. They form a strong and extremely capable team. As a result, leaders work quickly and effectively on identified areas for improvement. For example, they have worked successfully this year to ensure that all teachers receive the training and guidance needed to teach effective lessons. This has led to increasingly strong practice in the classroom and has supported your continuing drive for consistency. Leaders are now working to embed these changes so that improvements are securely in place. Parents and carers are positive about the teaching and also the way their children are cared for in school. One comment, which was echoed by others, was that 'teachers are fantastic, empathetic, and sympathetic'. Parents are clear that their children are very happy at the school.

The school has a calm and purposeful atmosphere and the pupils are unfailingly polite and well mannered. They show respect to adults and each other and are keen to learn. They participate fully in lessons. They listen and converse in a mature and thoughtful way. Pupils believe that they are challenged to do their best every day and they understand the value of resilience. They enjoy sports and music. Music is a strength of the school. Many pupils have learned an instrument for free and some have won prizes and awards in local competitions.

You are supported by a team of skilled governors who share your clear vision for the school and aspiration for your pupils. They work closely with you to identify priorities and monitor and evaluate progress. They focus on these aspects of school

development in their visits to the school. Governors are well informed about the school's progress in these areas.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are comprehensive. There is detailed analysis of emerging patterns or trends so that leaders can intervene early. They offer sensitive pastoral support where necessary. Relationships are well managed. Staff have a good understanding of current safeguarding guidance and procedures, and their training is up to date. They are clear on how to report concerns. Pre-employment checks on adults working at the school meet statutory requirements.

Governors carry out appropriate checks on safeguarding during the school year. The curriculum is well planned to help pupils understand how to stay safe. Pupils report that they feel safe at school and know how to stay safe outside school. Leaders work with other services to enrich the school's curriculum offer, anticipating and seeking to mitigate local risks. Partnerships with local agencies are strong and help to safeguard pupils.

Inspection findings

- The first key line of enquiry focused on what the school has done to provide greater challenge to pupils in reading. This was because progress in reading was average by the end of key stage 2 in 2018. This is an area that the school has made significant improvements to in order to accelerate progress for all pupils.
- There is clear, systematic focus on teaching the processes and skills of reading in all year groups. As a result, pupils tackle increasingly complex texts and question types with confidence. Leaders support and challenge teachers to have the highest expectations of pupils and ensure that staff receive the training they need when inconsistency occurs.
- Leaders identify and track pupils' progress in reading carefully and are quick to put in place targeted interventions for those who are at risk of falling behind. Leaders have carefully selected texts that will give pupils a wide range of challenging, high-quality reading experiences. These books have increased engagement with reading and improved outcomes.
- When pupils talk about the different aspects of books and texts, they are beginning to do so with more complex vocabulary. However, pupils are not yet able to do this routinely and with confidence in all classes. Leaders are aware that this is a next step in ensuring that reading outcomes continue to improve. They have begun work on this area.
- The second key line of enquiry focused on what leaders have done to ensure that increased proportions of the most able pupils attain the highest levels at key stage 2. This was identified as an area for improvement at the last inspection. As with their work on reading, leaders have tackled this area in a systematic and thoughtful way. This has led to increased proportions of pupils on track to attain the higher standard in most year groups.

- Leaders have planned and implemented a range of specific and high-quality interventions and experiences through careful assessment and understanding of need. These strategies have caused pupils to think and reason in a different way and link learning together. They then use these skills to tackle increasingly complex and challenging tasks.
- Leaders have made well-considered changes to the teaching of English and mathematics based on their understanding of the cohort. They have monitored and supported teachers in implementing these changes when needed. Pupils' outcomes, as seen in their books, show that, in most cases, these changes are having a measurable impact on pupils' outcomes. This is particularly so for those capable of achieving the higher standard.
- The third line of enquiry focused on how the school uses pupil premium funding to improve standards in writing. This was because in 2018 disadvantaged pupils did less well than their peers by the end of key stage 2. The school had identified this as an area for development and has put in place writing support for pupils, led by the most experienced members of staff, in order to close this gap.
- There is now a clear link between reading and writing which helps pupils to generate ideas, think and structure their pieces. The school uses its speech and language specialism to support all pupils in their speech and communication when composing sentences effectively before they come to write. This oral rehearsal is a feature of writing sessions and the pupils use it effectively.
- The writing seen in pupils' books shows that disadvantaged pupils are making good progress from their starting points and working, in many cases, in line with their peers. This is as a result of high-quality training in writing for staff. The training has been followed up by regular coaching sessions for teachers and additional input in some year groups. Leaders use moderation to benchmark expectations and know what effective writing should look like in different year groups. They are aware that the need to enrich pupils' vocabulary that is a focus in reading is also needed in writing. Leaders are beginning to address this.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they widen pupils' vocabulary in all subject areas, leading to better outcomes for all.

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

Yours sincerely

Karen Matthews
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I held meetings with you, senior and middle leaders. I met with two governors and your school improvement adviser. I met with pupils from a number of year groups. I visited classrooms across both key stages with senior leaders to gather evidence about the key lines of enquiry and to look at pupils' work. We considered documents, including the school's self-evaluation, information about pupils' progress, and documents relating to safeguarding. I listened to four children read. I also looked at information on the school's website. I analysed the confidential responses to the online inspection surveys from 20 members of staff. I also took into account the views of 30 parents who completed Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and 23 free-text responses.