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Mrs A Pullen
The Headteacher
Barnsole Primary School
Barnsole Road
Gillingham
ME7 2JE

Dear Mrs Pullen

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Barnsole Primary School

Following my visit with Daniel Towl, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 13 and 14 February 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because the predecessor junior school was judged to be a school causing concern.

Evidence

Inspectors observed lessons and looked at pupils' books. They scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and other senior staff. Inspectors also met a group of pupils, the Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:
the school is not making enough progress in raising standards for all pupils.

Context

Barnsole Primary School is much larger than the average primary school. There are 545 pupils on roll. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below average but growing steadily. An increasing number of pupils who join the school are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils who are entitled to free school meals is well above average. The percentage of pupils included in the

register of special educational needs is also well above average. The proportion of these who have a statement of special educational needs is broadly average.

The senior leadership team has been restructured. The deputy headteacher of the infant school now has this responsibility across both the infant and junior phases. Two assistant headteachers were recruited when the infant and junior school were amalgamated. There has not been a significant change to the teaching staff of the school since the amalgamation.

Achievement of pupils at the school

School leaders judge that standards are rising and predict that results in the statutory assessments at the end of Year 6 will be broadly in line with the national average this year. The school's records indicate that pupils in most classes have made at least the expected progress so far this year and many have made accelerated progress. Work seen in pupils' books during the inspection does not show such a positive picture. The best progress was seen in Year 6 books. Here, it is clear that many pupils are making up the ground they lost in previous years. Elsewhere in the school, work in English and mathematics books shows variations in progress between different groups of pupils. For example, books show that lower-attaining pupils and those pupils with disabilities or special educational needs often do not complete the work set for them and therefore do not make the expected progress in lessons.

School leaders have introduced a more structured approach to the teaching of letters and the sounds they make (phonics) across the school, but inspectors found that some staff in Key Stage 1 lack the subject knowledge required to teach this well. When listening to pupils reading, inspectors found that pupils in Year 1 and Year 2 need encouragement to use their knowledge of letter sounds to help them decode unfamiliar words. They tend to guess words or use the pictures to help them understand the story. In Key Stage 2, poor spelling hampers pupils' writing. Pupils often misspell simple words and teachers do not respond to these errors when marking pupils' work.

The school provides additional small-group support outside the classroom for those pupils who have fallen behind or are at risk of underachievement. Records show that this support has not helped pupils to make more than expected progress so far this year. Gaps do not appear to be narrowing in some year groups.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is variable across the school. School leaders have correctly identified that some teachers do not have enough in-depth knowledge to teach phonics, writing and mathematics really well. Teachers plan lessons in their year group teams to ensure there is consistency in the coverage of subjects. Some teachers do not adapt these core plans to meet the needs of different groups of pupils. As a result, some pupils do not achieve well in lessons.

Teachers do not always make effective use of teaching assistants in lessons. In several lessons seen during the inspection, teaching assistants were not actively engaged in supporting pupils during teacher-led sessions.

The quality of teachers' marking and feedback to pupils is inconsistent. In the best cases, books are marked regularly and teachers give pupils good guidance on what they need to do to improve. They ask pupils to correct errors and they give pupils time in lessons to do this.

All teachers try to make learning fun for pupils and encourage collaboration and teamwork. They make good use of themed topics to link different subjects together. For example, during the inspection, pupils in all classes were celebrating 'Carnivals around the World'. This also promotes awareness of other cultures.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

There is a purposeful atmosphere in classrooms and pupils generally move around the school sensibly. They are usually courteous to adults. Pupils who have particular difficulty in managing their behaviour are well supported, but are not always able to remain in the classroom.

In the lessons seen during the inspection, pupils were keen to join in discussion, but did not always listen to each other and some shouted out answers in response to teachers' questions. Teachers do not always manage this behaviour consistently and give mixed messages to pupils about whether this is acceptable. In lessons where the work is too challenging or the teacher's expectation is unclear, some pupils lose concentration and begin to chatter.

So far this year, attendance and punctuality are broadly average. The family liaison officer works closely with the officer from the local authority and keeps a close check on any persistent absence.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The new leadership team is fully committed to driving the school forward and is working hard. However, some members of the team have not had previous leadership experience and are still developing their skills in leading and managing the work of others. Some roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined. For example, it is not evident how each member of the leadership team contributes to leading vital improvements in the quality of teaching. Some teachers who need help to improve their practice are not receiving support.

The school development plan states what effect actions are expected to have on pupils' attainment and progress, but does not set out exactly what will have been achieved at specific points during the year. It is therefore difficult for school leaders and governors to judge whether the school is on track to achieve its goals. The

school's summary of self-evaluation is over generous and does not provide an accurate picture of pupils' achievement or the quality of teaching in the school.

The governing body has a high profile in the school and supports school leaders well. Minutes of meetings do not record many questions from governors, so it is not clear how effectively governors challenge school leaders. The headteacher presents extremely detailed reports to the governing body on all aspects of the school's work, but tables showing pupils' progress made during the year lack clarity. It is difficult for governors to judge how many pupils are on track to make good progress. The governing body does not currently receive enough information about the impact of additional government funding (the pupil premium) on pupils' achievement.

External support

The attached local authority adviser visits the school regularly to check on the school's progress, but the local authority does not provide much direct support to teachers in school. The headteacher prefers to use external consultants to support improvement in the quality of teaching and in leadership and management. The impact of this support has been variable.

The headteacher values the support of local colleagues. Partnerships with local schools have helped her to develop new formats for school self-evaluation and improvement planning.

Priorities for further improvement

- Develop teachers' subject knowledge in the teaching of phonics, writing and mathematics.
- Ensure that teachers always plan activities in lessons that are well matched to the needs of all pupils.
- Ensure that all teachers whose practice is not consistently good have intensive support to improve.
- Review the school development plan and set out clearly what should be achieved through the year.
- Ensure that the governing body receives clear, unambiguous information on pupils' progress.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Melanie Knowles
Her Majesty's Inspector