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1 May 2014

Mr Sean McKeown  
Barnsole Primary School  
Sturdee Avenue  
Gillingham  
ME7 2JE

Dear Mr McKeown

## **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Barnsole Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 30 April 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in December 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- revise and extend its action plan, so that it covers a broader range of the school's work
- reconsider the roles of the school's senior leaders and the organisation of the senior leadership team, to ensure that the work of this team has the greatest possible impact.

## **Evidence**

During the visit, I met with you, senior staff, and representatives of the Governing Body and the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated documents, including the school action plan and school data about pupils'

academic progress. We toured the school together, visiting lessons in all year groups on both sites, looking at samples of pupils' work. I also met with a large group of staff briefly at the end of the school day.

## **Context**

You became headteacher at the start of this term, just a week before my visit.

## **Main findings**

You have hit the ground running as the new headteacher. In a very short time, you have gained the commitment of staff and started to release their enthusiasm. You are asking yourself, and them, the right questions about the school and thinking carefully about the next steps. This is very good to see.

You perceive great potential for Barnsole. I see this too. Staff and pupils want to succeed. Governors and the local authority are right behind you and the school. You have inherited a situation where teachers and support staff have developed some consistent practices across the school, for example in setting learning objectives in lessons and in organising the differentiation of work in lessons to suit the different needs of pupils. This is good, and a firm foundation for future improvement, but it does not mean that the quality of teaching itself is consistent. The lessons that we briefly observed together indicated many strengths in teaching, and seemed interesting, but there are also areas for development. In some classes, for example, although we saw teachers explaining things clearly, the pupils were not always fully involved; for instance, those who did not put up their hand to answer questions could opt out.

We discussed how it will be valuable to work with and alongside staff in developing their confidence in applying the shared practices rigorously but more flexibly, and tweaking their teaching methods, to meet the needs of their classes.

In a large school, such training, coaching and mentoring of staff is a particularly time consuming and labour intensive process. We considered together how important it will be to ensure that the job descriptions and accountabilities of senior staff are fit for these key tasks. It may be, for example, that the current phase leadership system rather duplicates the roles of year leaders, or could do so. Some, if not all, senior roles, might usefully therefore include or consist of further whole-school responsibilities. This is for you to decide.

The school has a clear view of how well pupils in each year group are progressing in English and mathematics. You have already taken steps to improve this analysis by purchasing new software. I was pleased to note that the planning and assessment systems used in Reception classes are suitably organised and dovetailed together.

You and the senior staff expect that the national assessments in Early Years Foundation Stage, Key Stage One and Key Stage Two, are all likely to show some improvement this year from 2013. Although there is further work to do, if these predictions are correct, it will of course be good for the pupils, show positive momentum and provide encouragement to the school community.

We discussed together how a great school – which is your fitting ambition for Barnsole – involves more than achieving high standards in the core subjects of English and mathematics, absolutely vital though these are. It is important that pupils enjoy a wide range of rich experiences across the whole curriculum. In turn, this tends to help raise standards in the core. We observed one interesting lesson together where pupils were looking at photographs of the jungle. We agreed that this lesson might have been better still outside, where pupils would have had immediate access to leaves, trees and grass, thus deepening their experience. In the same vein, an assistant headteacher described how pupils had used better vocabulary in a writing task after she took them outside to 'be' a river last week. We talked about the value of the arts, humanities, residential experiences and sport. It was good to hear about some developments in these areas, some of them appropriately funded by the pupil premium. The local music hub provides some instrumental teaching to classes. We talked about the importance of linking this work to the rest of the school's music curriculum and how it should be possible to use the expertise within the local music hub for this purpose.

The current school action plan, which is based on the inspection recommendations, is well-constructed and has helped bring some improvement since the inspection. It will be useful to build on, and expand, this plan to encompass the wider agendas we have discussed, and to take forward the school's emerging vision and values.

The Governing Body works hard. Its members have been steadfast in seeing the school through a busy period of change and some uncertainty, which included the inspection and the appointment of yourself as the new headteacher. Governors continue to develop their work thoughtfully. It was helpful to discuss with them the importance of their taking a specific role in the monitoring and evaluation of the new school improvement plan. Their programme of visits to the school should reflect the school's key improvement priorities.

I look forward to continuing to work with you. Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

## **External support**

The local authority has been instrumental, along with the Governing Body, in helping and guiding the school successfully through this recent period of change. Local authority officers and consultants provide valuable support in a range of aspects. The school's attached adviser shares with you and me the belief in the potential of the school. He has developed a deep and astute knowledge of the school. He is ready to work with you on the agenda ahead.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Medway.

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**