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Mr Andrew Gould
Acting Headteacher
Barming Primary School
Belmont Close
Maidstone
ME16 9DY

Dear Mr Gould

Special measures monitoring inspection of Barming Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 11 June 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2015.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, four members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and the subject leaders for mathematics and English. Brief visits were made to all classes and the playground at lunchtime, to see the school in action. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated. The checks made on staff about their suitability to work with children were also reviewed.

Context

The substantive headteacher resigned at the end of February 2015, after which there was a short period of interim leadership by the headteacher from Park Way School. An acting headteacher was appointed in April 2015, to be in post until August 2016. The new Chair of the Governing Body started in April 2015.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

On his arrival, the acting headteacher rightly prioritised the most important areas for improvement to help staff focus their work effectively. Key leadership roles are more defined and there is a shared sense of purpose across the school as actions are systematically tackled.

The school's action plan is sensibly closely aligned to the local authority's statement of action, so there is a common focus. There are purposeful actions to tackle the identified areas for improvement, with clear success criteria so everyone knows what to aim for. Useful milestones help governors and leaders check the progress of the plan. School leaders and the local authority recognise the need to review some of the plan's targets so there is the correct level of challenge for all pupils, including the most able.

Since April, leaders have rightly concentrated on developing the school's procedures to check pupils' progress. There is now a single assessment system to avoid confusion, and teachers receive effective support to use this correctly. Teachers hold helpful discussions about pupils' work. These are helping ensure their judgements are accurate across the school, although there is further to go to ensure this is always the case.

Subject leaders for mathematics and English are starting to help drive improvements. For example, they hold useful sessions to raise teachers' expectations of the level of challenge they should offer their pupils, in line with the new curriculum. The acting headteacher ensures they have the right training for this work, which has increased their confidence and skills. They happily report that they are, 'more able to lead, to do what we think needs doing and to have time to do it'.

The acting headteacher sets clear expectations for teachers in areas such as planning and feedback to pupils. Phase leaders properly use their allocated time to check teachers follow these guidelines correctly, and identify where more work is needed. This is starting to ensure more consistently good practice across the school, but there is more to be done so that all phase leaders make equally robust recommendations.

Leaders and governors took swift action to address concerns raised during the inspection in January 2015, relating to behaviour and safety. There is improved site security and higher supervision levels at playtimes to keep pupils safe. The acting headteacher is establishing new school rules to provide a shared understanding of how pupils should behave. Lessons in diversity and tolerance have also been delivered, to raise pupils' awareness of treating others with respect. The impact of this work has not been formally checked, but the acting headteacher notes that he has received no reports of homophobic name-calling mentioned in the last report.

The governing body reconstituted following the inspection and there is a new Chair. Governors have valuable skills in education, business and the community to help effectively support and challenge the school. A National Leader of Governance has also been co-opted to strengthen the governing body. Governors attended useful training to develop a better understanding of the school's data so they can ask the right questions about standards. There is also a new system of 'monitoring pairs' to help governors check methodically how well the school is doing. There is not enough evidence at this early stage to see how well all this work enables governors to hold the school robustly to account. The external review of the school's use of pupil premium (additional funding for disadvantaged pupils) is now arranged.

The local authority provides helpful support to the school. For example, the improvement adviser observed lessons alongside subject leaders to verify their judgements about learning; this increased their confidence to work more independently. The local authority has rightly identified a Kent Leader of Education to offer additional support to the acting headteacher if required.

Following the monitoring inspection these judgements were made:

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Gard
Her Majesty's Inspector