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18 March 2016

Mr Andrew Gould  
Barming Primary School  
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Kent  
ME16 9DY

Dear Mr Gould

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Barming Primary School**

Following my visit with Nicola Cale, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 23–24 February 2016, 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 that have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in January 2015. The full list of the areas for improvement that were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Amanda Gard

**Ofsted Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in January 2015.**

- Rapidly improve teaching and accelerate progress across the school in English and mathematics, especially in reading, for all pupils, by:
  - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve, especially disabled pupils, those with special educational needs and the most able
  - improving teachers' ability to check each pupil's level of understanding accurately
  - setting work that is well matched to pupils' needs and abilities and providing sufficient support and challenge
  - ensuring that teachers' advice consistently helps pupils to improve, and checking regularly that pupils act on the advice given
  - making sure that all staff teach reading consistently well and provide pupils with books that are neither too hard nor too easy for them to read
  - ensuring that teaching assistants contribute consistently well to pupils' learning
  - ensuring that pupils contribute well in all lessons and follow teachers' instructions promptly
  - ensuring that pupils consistently present their work well in books.
  
- Improve safeguarding arrangements within the school by ensuring that:
  - leaders regularly check site safety and security and take swift action when weaknesses are identified
  - there are suitable levels of staff supervision outside at playtimes
  - pupils are given clear and effective messages about the inappropriateness of derogatory language.
  
- Improve the effectiveness of the school's leadership and management by:
  - ensuring that governors act upon the recommendations of their recent review and hold senior leaders more rigorously to account for the quality of teaching, safeguarding and achievement in the school
  - developing the effectiveness of subject leaders so they are better able to take actions to improve achievement and teaching
  - establishing a robust system to evaluate the impact of additional funding on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils across the school, especially in reading, and of the sports premium.

An external review of the school's use of pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved. A review of the effectiveness of governance has already been commissioned.

## **Report on the third monitoring inspection on 23–24 February 2016**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed teaching and learning in every year group, making a total of 18 visits to classrooms. Senior leaders accompanied inspectors on 15 of these observations. Inspectors looked at pupils' workbooks and heard pupils read. Inspectors met with the headteacher, subject leaders for English and mathematics and the early years leader. They also met a group of pupils, a group of teachers, the senior leadership team (phase leaders and inclusion manager), three governors and a representative from the local authority. There were too few responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) to generate an analysis, but an inspector spoke informally to parents at the school gate. An inspector observed lunchtime and spoke informally to pupils. Inspectors took into consideration minutes of the governing body, information about pupils' progress, the school's action plans and documentation relating to safeguarding, attendance figures and the school's records of checks made on the quality of teaching.

### **Context**

The phase leader for Key Stage 1 stepped down in November 2015. A new teacher was appointed to the role from January 2016. This position is part time and temporary until July 2016. Following consultation with parents, the school is due to join a multi-academy trust with Allington Primary School on 1 September 2016.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

Since the last monitoring inspection, the headteacher has developed the role of phase leaders to make them more effective in driving improvements. They approach their work with renewed energy and determination. Leaders all recognise that much more needs to be done to ensure that teaching is consistently good or better across the school. They now make careful checks on the quality of teaching and consequently have a much clearer picture of exactly where improvement is needed. Leaders appreciate that when issues are identified, they need to address them more urgently, in order to tackle underachievement and raise standards. Robust systems are now in place to ensure that leaders follow up their recommendations to teachers. This work is at an early stage but there is already some evidence that teachers are starting to act on leaders' suggestions to improve their work.

Senior leaders rightly use phase meetings to disseminate important information about expectations. They ensure that the same key points are covered by the common agenda, so all staff receive the same messages. This is helping to build consistency across the school.

There are helpful discussions in each phase meeting about the progress of individual pupils, and strategies to support them. Teachers are increasingly

confident in using the school's pupil progress tracking system to support this work. A range of interventions, such as handwriting work, mathematics extension groups and 'memory magic' are in place to help pupils improve. Pupils are now given more measurable small-step objectives, such as specific aims for their handwriting, so they know what to work on. This also helps teachers check exactly what has been achieved. However, information collected from this work is not used strategically. For example, even when pupils make little progress, interventions continue in the same way. This lack of strategy slows the rate of improvement.

Leaders have collated recent information about pupils' achievement to show the attainment and progress of key groups such as boys, girls and disadvantaged pupils. They are starting to use this to try to tackle underachievement. For example, some teachers focused on a group of boys in their class, aiming to improve standards in writing. However, leaders have not analysed the information in enough detail to help them understand the strengths and weaknesses in provision. They have not set revised targets for individuals and key groups, to help them catch up. Consequently, although everyone knows they are aiming to raise standards, they are not focused well enough on the most effective strategies to employ, and are not able to check whether they are on track to reach their goals.

Governors are well aware of the challenges facing the school. They ask searching questions about pupil progress and what action leaders are taking to make improvements. However, the lack of strategic overview holds them back. They are not able to check whether the school is making the right progress as there are no up-to-date targets or milestones against which to measure.

Following consultation with parents, the school is moving towards academy status. Barming is due to become part of a multi-academy trust with Allington Primary School on 1 September 2016. The new trust has advertised for a head of school for Barming Primary.

Governors have ensured that safeguarding arrangements currently continue to meet requirements.

## **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

The quality of teaching remains inconsistent across the school. Although leaders have a better understanding of what needs to be done, there has not been enough improvement since the last monitoring inspection. Many of the issues remain to be tackled. Consequently, standards of achievement are not rising quickly enough.

There are pockets of good practice on which to build. Where teaching is most successful, teachers use assessment information effectively to plan flexible teaching groups. They target specific pupils who are falling behind, to help them catch up. They set purposeful tasks which engage pupils' interest. For example, in one class pupils were very motivated to write effective instructions because the work was set in the context of making a cup of tea on Mothers' Day. In many classes there are well-established routines and structures, helping lessons to flow smoothly and

without interruption. Teaching assistants are often deployed more effectively than before, to offer helpful support to learners. Teachers in the early years set high expectations. They use questioning precisely, to encourage children to think hard. Children are encouraged to practise writing numbers, letters and words to further develop their understanding and help them make good progress.

At the last monitoring inspection, the level of challenge provided in lessons was variable. Observations in classrooms, together with the work seen in pupils' books, indicate that this is still the case. Pupils too often spend too long repeating work they can already do. This leads to lack of motivation. In some lessons, teachers do not explain tasks clearly so pupils do not get down to their work, wasting time. In other lessons, pupils are left uncertain about their learning because the teacher does not tackle misconceptions well enough. On these occasions, progress stalls. Less-able pupils are over-reliant on adult support, so they are not developing into independent and confident learners.

Teachers continue to mark work conscientiously and in line with the school's policy. Consequently, pupils can quickly see when they have met the criteria for successful learning. However, pupils' books seen during this inspection showed teachers offering fewer challenges to make pupils think hard, or check their understanding, than previously. Corrections in writing focus mainly on spelling and punctuation, missing opportunities to encourage more sophisticated writing styles or improve the application of grammatical skills. Although a Year 6 pupil commented that teachers expect corrections to be made and that, 'now they're more strict on it', this is not the case in all classes. Leaders agreed that their checks identify the same issues; they have sensible plans to develop this area of the school's work.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

Pupils' conduct continues to be good around the school and in lessons. They are polite and welcoming to visitors. Pupils are almost always fully compliant in lessons, settling quickly to their work. They take care to present their work well. Where teaching is stronger, there is a real buzz of learning and pupils are very motivated to get on. There are very few incidences of low-level disruption, and teachers are quick to react and correct pupils if these occur.

Supervision levels in the playground are appropriate to keep pupils safe. The new electronic entrance gates, which restrict access during the school day, have further enhanced site security.

Currently, overall attendance levels are in line with the national average. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils is improving compared to last year so that it is also currently in line with the national average.

## **Outcomes for pupils**

The school's most recent information about pupil achievement raises concerns. Standards are not improving quickly enough or are worsening. Work to raise standards lacks focus because there are no definitive targets for leaders and teachers to track progress.

In mathematics, there has been a slight dip in achievement in most year groups. The mathematics subject leader has sensibly analysed which areas each year group should focus on, to raise standards. For example, pupils in Year 5 need to develop better recall and application of times tables. A recent staff meeting on 'mastery in mathematics' aimed to help teachers understand what is expected from the new curriculum. There has not been an opportunity to check how well teachers are applying what they learned to tackle weaker areas and deepen pupils' understanding.

Writing standards are deteriorating across the school. Leaders attribute this to poor spelling and grammar. Therefore, the subject leader for English has properly reviewed the spelling policy and ordered a new scheme of work for spelling, to provide additional support for teachers. Although this will be helpful to boost teachers' confidence, the subject leader is aware of the need to set a consistent level of high expectation in this area. Pupils' books show there is an emphasis on teaching grammar as well as the features of different genres of writing. However, this is often isolated work without a clear purpose for learning. There are too few opportunities for pupils to write at length or apply the skills they have learned in context. As a result, it is hard for teachers to assess exactly how well pupils are achieving.

Senior leaders are aware that teachers do not keep the individual targets for writing in pupils' books up to date. As a result, pupils are unsure where to focus their efforts. There are rightly plans to review this system shortly.

'Star Writers' was introduced recently, to promote writing across the school. Pupils are currently positive about having their work displayed, receiving a certificate in assembly and the chance to take their writing home. However, already the pupils' writing on the boards has not been updated weekly as agreed. Some boards are too high or inaccessible for pupils to see the work easily. In addition, teachers do not indicate why the work was chosen, to inspire other pupils and show them what to aim for. This all needs to be addressed so that this well-intentioned initiative does not become a missed opportunity.

Last year, standards in the phonics (letters and the sounds they make) screening check were below the national average. Teachers use the 'phonics phase tracker', which was new at the last monitoring inspection, more effectively. They plan work at the right level of challenge and many engage pupils fully in lessons, through stories and songs. Pupils who read to an inspector applied their skills effectively to

tackle unknown words when reading aloud. However, leaders do not use the tracker strategically to raise standards. Although they know which pupils are making progress, there are no targets to help them check whether this progress is fast enough. Leaders have not established what proportion of pupils are on track to meet the standard for the phonics screening check this year. Consequently, they are not focusing additional support where pupils are at risk of underachievement.

In reading, standards in most classes remain static. There has been recent training for teachers on guided reading. This encouraged teachers to provide a range of opportunities for pupils to practise different skills across a week, and to read to adults. The subject leader for English has not yet had the opportunity to check how well this is being implemented and whether there is any impact on pupils' achievement. New books have rightly been ordered for classrooms, to help promote a love of reading.

The gap in achievement between disadvantaged pupils and their peers has widened in reading, writing or mathematics in most classes. Often these pupils have fallen behind in more than one of these subjects. A review of the school's use of the pupil premium (additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils), which took place in July 2015, set out clear actions for the school, to ensure effective spending of this money. However, there is still no strategic plan to ensure that disadvantaged pupils do as well as they should. Leaders do not know what has worked well to date, because they are only just beginning to evaluate the impact of their spending. Pupils are reviewed individually, but there is too little emphasis on closing the gaps for these pupils as a group. There are no targets to ensure that they make more rapid progress to catch up with where they should be. Urgent action needs to be taken, to eliminate the risk of further underachievement.

### **External support**

The local authority continues to provide helpful practical support. Advisers assist in developing leaders' skills as well as providing useful advice, for example about the new curriculum. Many teachers have had the opportunity to visit other schools, and some brought back ideas to implement at Barming. These visits were less effective than they could have been because teachers were not accompanied by senior leaders in order to discuss and build on the good practice seen elsewhere.