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Mrs Jacqui Barnard
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Barnard

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Marks Gate Infants' School

Following my visit to your school on 19 May 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 September 2016. 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- include regular checks and targets for pupils' progress in improvement planning, including for disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children who are on track or likely to exceed the early learning goals.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, members of the monitoring board and governors, including the interim chair of the governing body, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also held a conversation with a representative of the local authority. I scrutinised the external reviews of the governing body and the pupil premium. The school improvement plan was evaluated. You shared with me a range of documents to show how you are monitoring improvements to pupils' progress and attainment. An opportunity to walk around the school with you enabled me to see pupils at work in lessons.

Context

Since the previous inspection, you have restructured the leadership team to ensure that the school's key priorities are led and managed more effectively. The chair of the governing body retired, and an interim chair was appointed by the local authority. The governing body was subsequently reconstituted, leading to the appointment of several new governors.

Main findings

Both you and the interim chair of the governing body told me that the previous inspection gave you a clear mandate for significant and much-needed change. With support from the local authority, an external review of governance and an external review of the use of the pupil premium funding have been undertaken. It is evident from my observations that many of the recommendations have been implemented, along with further actions to secure improvements, as outlined in the school development plan.

You have made sure that everyone – leaders, teachers and support staff – have clarity about their roles and responsibilities. You have raised everyone's expectations, making sure that all share your mantra that pupils are at the heart of the school's work. You motivate everyone to work with you in your drive to secure rapid improvements in all aspects of the school's performance, and hold everyone to account for pupils' achievement.

Senior leaders are now better placed to address successfully the recommendations identified at the time of the last inspection. This includes governors, who now have a much clearer grasp of their strategic and statutory responsibilities. They are better informed through meetings, including those with the local authority monitoring board, and because you provide them with clear and accurate information. Nonetheless, governors and members of the monitoring board do not have an overview of the proportion of the most able children, including disadvantaged children, who are on track to exceed the early learning goals. Therefore, they do not know whether the most able children are being stretched sufficiently in their

learning. Equally, they cannot be confident that the gap is diminishing at the end of Reception between non-disadvantaged most-able children and disadvantaged most-able children.

You and other leaders have a good understanding of the school's performance, as a result of a robust monitoring cycle to accurately gauge the quality of teaching and learning. Your judgements are accurate because they are regularly validated by the teaching and learning group, led by the local authority adviser. Equally, you have made sure that rigorous assessments are in place to check the progress rates and attainment levels of pupils. These assessments are accurate because they are verified internally and externally. Monitoring evidence and the recommendations of the previous inspection are woven through the school development plan. Although you are working on the right priorities, the plan lacks measurable milestones and targets. This prevents governors and members of the local authority monitoring board from holding you and leaders fully to account.

Assessments are used effectively to keep a close watch on pupils' progress towards their targets. Pupil progress meetings provide a regular platform for leaders and teachers to unpick how well different groups are performing. Leaders and staff assess the impact of interventions to boost progress for those pupils at risk of underachieving. The pupil premium funding is now used well to eliminate the gap between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils. Indeed, your assessments confirm that the impact of these interventions is successfully securing better outcomes for this group of pupils. This is particularly so in Year 2, where these disadvantaged pupils are outperforming other pupils in reading, writing and mathematics. Work in pupils' books confirms that the majority of pupils are on track to achieve age-related expectations in writing and mathematics.

Linked to the monitoring cycle is the staff appraisal process, where professional development and training are specifically focused on the school's priorities as well as tailored to individual needs. Teachers' subject knowledge is being strengthened through English and mathematics training. Staff have a better understanding of what good or better teaching looks like, by observing effective practitioners in school and in other good or better schools. Effective colleagues also coach and model good or better teaching.

You have been resolute in securing a consistent approach in promoting pupils' positive behaviour and attitudes to learning through a review of the behaviour policy. My observations confirm that pupils are focused learners who take pride in their work. They rise to the challenge of teachers' probing questions, which encourages them to reflect on their own and their friends' learning. Pupils are cooperative and becoming independent learners. This is moving their progress on at a faster pace.

You explained that the main improvement strategy has been the introduction of a

literacy programme which includes the systematic daily teaching of phonics. Children in the early years and pupils in key stage 1 are taught in groups commensurate with their ability. Regular assessments mean that the pace of learning does not slow down, as teaching consistently provides the right level of support and challenge for pupils. The literacy programme also secures intensive training for all staff, including teaching assistants, who take on the responsibility for pupils' progress enthusiastically. It is evident from the assessment information and work in pupils' books that this initiative is having a significant influence in boosting pupils' reading and writing skills.

You clarified that staff have received some training and support for mathematics. You have reviewed the calculation policy to ensure that pupils have greater opportunities to think about the methods they use when calculating and solving problems. You are not complacent and have well-thought-out plans to develop and strengthen the teaching of mathematics still further.

Much of the work to raise the quality of teaching and learning has also improved the early years provision. Additionally, the head of school is currently overseeing this phase, which has improved teamwork, as well as stronger partnership work with parents. You explained that parents attend workshops to help them support their children at home in phonics and mathematics. The local authority early years adviser provides a clear steer in improving the quality of teaching and learning, through coaching and mentoring staff. Both the indoor and outdoor classrooms now provide stimulating and well-resourced learning areas for children to work and play. This local authority support means that staff are better equipped to observe, record and assess children's learning accurately, leading to improved planning and progress for all abilities.

External support

The local authority has been decisive in responding to the key issues identified at the time of the last inspection. As a consequence, it commissioned an external review of the governing body and appointed an interim chair. You, other leaders and governors find this support invaluable. The half-termly local authority monitoring board meetings, comprising senior officers, keep a close eye on the school's performance and how well leaders are securing improvements. Minutes of governor meetings verify that governors are now challenging and supporting you and other leaders well. The local authority link adviser, who also works with you at the junior school, provides very effective support and advice. She has helped the school to build up important and strong partnerships with other schools.

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

Yours sincerely

Mary Hinds

Her Majesty's Inspector