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Mrs Marie Ziane
Headteacher
Becontree Primary School
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Dear Mrs Ziane

Short inspection of Becontree Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 31 October 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in September 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You are building well on the effective action taken to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. You and your leadership team continually focus on improving teaching and learning. Individual training programmes for staff, for example, are leading to improvements in practice across the school. In addition, the early years environment has greatly improved. It is now a highly stimulating environment for children both inside and out.

You have quickly set out your vision for the next stage of the school's development. Your pursuit of this vision is supported well by a strong team of senior and other leaders. They are all focused on driving action to meet key priorities that derive from accurate and thorough school self-evaluation. They feel empowered by the extra responsibility you have given them, while understanding that you hold them closely to account for performance in their areas.

Pupils make strong progress in writing and mathematics. Their attainment is above average in both subjects by the end of Year 6. You have reacted quickly to a slowdown in their progress in reading at key stage 2 by changing the way key skills are taught. This is starting to have an impact, but not consistently so. Effective use of the pupil premium to reduce the size of teaching groups is leading to strong progress for disadvantaged pupils. Their attainment is above average in writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2.

You focus all adults across the school on promoting language and communication skills more effectively because pupils' starting points are relatively low. Children in the early years are becoming more secure in these skills through immersion in an environment rich in visual and spoken language. Teachers and support staff make sure that they provide children with a clear and accurate model of spoken English. However, their questions do not always make sure that pupils extend their answers fully and do so in grammatically correct sentences.

The governing body has become highly effective. Reorganising procedures and increasing expertise means that governors question you and other leaders effectively. They provide valuable support for school improvement and carefully monitor the impact of action taken. The local authority and other schools in your partnership provide the school with valuable support and further challenge.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. A strong culture of safeguarding is evident at all levels across the school. Training keeps staff vigilant to the signs to look out for so that they can report their concerns quickly to designated leaders. This includes staff new to the school, who are equally vigilant and clear about procedures.

Leaders are very aware of the vulnerabilities of families and their children. Staff provide bespoke support often with the help and guidance of outside agencies. By carefully checking pupils' attendance, you spot and take swift action where pupils might have gone missing from education or possibly be at risk of female genital mutilation.

Through the programme developed by the local authority in conjunction with the NSPCC, pupils learn how to identify risks they might face. They understand the precautions to take so that they do not come to harm. These include not giving out personal information online or contacting strangers. Pupils feel safe in school and know they can turn to someone if they have problems or concerns.

Inspection findings

- Evaluating the success of your action to tackle the dip in progress and attainment in reading at key stage 2 was a key focus for my visit. Your evaluation of the pupils' recent performance has identified weaknesses in their vocabulary and their skills of inference.
- The training you have put in place focuses sharply on how to develop a particular higher-order skill. I saw some effective learning from confident and highly expert teachers questioning pupils closely to draw out their thoughts. Pupils are engaged and interested in reading. They read regularly at home and, by upper key stage 2, can talk about their favourite types of books and authors.
- Phonics teaching is effective. An average proportion of pupils reach the expected standard by the end of Year 1. Intensive teaching enables almost all pupils who

do not reach this standard to catch up by the end of Year 2.

- In spite of the action you and your staff are taking, you are aware of some variability in the quality of teaching. Not all teachers are clear about how to use their questions to help pupils take meaning from texts they study, or to teach skills such as inference. Furthermore, some texts studied are not particularly challenging. They do not provide the scope to develop higher-order skills or enable pupils to see how authors construct their writing.
- We explored the strategies behind the pupils' strong progress in mathematics. One factor is the way the school has openly embraced changes to the national curriculum. Strong leadership picks up where teachers might not be secure in their subject expertise. The highly effective and focused training that follows often includes working alongside an expert within the school.
- Teaching builds well on the pupils' skills and understanding. Teachers continually identify what pupils can do and make quick adjustments to their teaching. No time is wasted because pupils move quickly on once they have mastered a skill or are supported further to eliminate misconceptions.
- Pupils develop basic mathematical skills rapidly. They become fluent and accurate in their calculations. Pupils deepen their understanding and reasoning by applying their skills to problems and puzzles in a written form. They are expected to show their working to explain their reasoning. By contrast, teachers do not always use their questions to get pupils to explain verbally the thinking behind their answers. This does not help extend pupils' language and communication skills.
- During the inspection, I wanted to check whether the curriculum supported the learning of all pupils and the extent to which they study subjects in depth. The curriculum, including special events, extends pupils' thinking and learning. The curriculum and special events are all accessible to pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, although they may record outcomes differently. Music and physical education give pupils confidence and a chance to shine.
- Changes to teaching are successfully meeting your aim of teaching subjects other than English and mathematics in depth. Teaching explores key subject skills in depth and also provides continuity to the pupils' learning. Science teaching provides opportunities for pupils to investigate, record measurements and draw conclusions. In music, Year 5 pupils greatly enjoy the chance to learn to play the guitar. They can continue this, if they wish, into Year 6 and beyond. 'Body percussion' is another aspect of music greatly enjoyed by pupils.
- Special events, such as visits to city companies, fire the pupils' imaginations and raise their aspirations about potential future careers. A project follows from these visits. This has included Year 5 pupils designing a community centre after visiting a land development company. An outside group helps teachers to design and plan a 'Challenge Day' activity for the whole school. Recent examples have been solving a 'crime' that took place in the school hall or designing a vehicle for a journey on an alien planet. These are greatly enjoyed and live long in the pupils' memories.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- teachers' questioning skills are improved further so that they draw out pupils' ideas in greater depth in reading and probe pupils' reasoning in mathematics
- pupils at key stage 2 are provided with access to high-quality texts so they can see how authors construct their work and use this to develop their writing further.

I am copying this letter to the co-chairs 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

Martin Beale
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

- I met you and your deputy headteacher, as well as other members of staff with leadership responsibilities. I met the co-chairs of the governing body and one other governor. I also held a meeting with a local authority adviser.
- You and other senior leaders accompanied me when I visited parts of lessons. I also observed pupils as they moved around the school.
- I met with a group of pupils to discuss their experiences of school.
- I took account of the 15 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also took account of the 32 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- I evaluated safeguarding procedures, including policies to keep children safe and records of training and safeguarding checks.