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Mrs Susan Courbet and Ms Rhiannon Suttle
Headteachers
Great Barr Primary School
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Dear Mrs Courbet and Ms Suttle

Short inspection of Great Barr Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 16 January 2018, 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 July 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your clear, no-nonsense leadership is appreciated by staff, who form a hard-working and dedicated team. All staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire said that they are proud to work at the school. They are fully committed to your vision to 'help children become fully developed, caring people, capable of working in every way to the best of their ability'. The care shown to pupils, both by adults and by other pupils, shines out as a strength of the school. This is particularly evident for vulnerable pupils, including the high number of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.

You, ably supported by senior leaders and governors, know the school well. You are rightly proud of its inclusive ethos and the academic standards achieved by pupils. However, you are not complacent and you continually seek to improve those areas where you identify there is more to be done.

Parents, carers and pupils value your leadership and the education provided by the school. One parent who responded to Parent View spoke for many when they wrote: 'I feel my children are very happy and taught well in this school. I would not hesitate in recommending it to other parents.'

At the school's previous inspection, you were tasked with improving pupils' handwriting and presentation of written work and with ensuring that pupils make the best possible progress.

You have successfully addressed these areas. Your clear focus on developing pupils' written work means that pupils, in all classes, now produce consistently well-presented work using cursive script.

Pupils now make very strong progress in mathematics. You are aware that their progress in reading and writing, although good, lags a little behind that in mathematics. The previous inspection also required you to extend aspects of outstanding teaching across all classes and subjects. Teaching is now consistently effective in both English and mathematics. However, the teaching of some other subjects is not as strong.

Safeguarding is effective.

You ensure that all staff know that keeping pupils safe is their top priority. All staff are well trained and alert to any signs that pupils might need extra help. They readily refer any concerns they have, secure in the knowledge that you will deal with them quickly and appropriately. You involve outside agencies when needed and you have no qualms in challenging agencies if you feel that their actions have not been appropriate to keep a child safe. All staff who completed the inspection questionnaire said that pupils are safe in school.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Procedures to recruit staff safely are fully understood and used well. Child-protection records are detailed, well organised and stored securely.

I spoke with many pupils during the inspection. All told me that they feel safe and cared for in school. They told me that bullying is very rare indeed and that they have great confidence in teachers and other adults in school to deal with any that does happen. Pupils are knowledgeable about how to keep themselves safe, for example when using the internet, because they have been taught about it in class. They told me that they should never reveal personal information online and should only be 'friends' with people they know.

You work hard to support parents in keeping their children safe. For example, you provide a dedicated email address that parents can use to access advice. You also have a technician available at each parents' evening ready to provide help with devices and social networking. The overwhelming majority of parents who completed Parent View said that their child is safe and well cared for in school.

Inspection findings

- The inspection's first focus area was the quality of pupils' writing in key stages 1 and 2. Your actions to improve writing since the previous inspection have proved successful. Teachers' expectations are high, and pupils now write accurately and at length in all classes. Writing 'non-negotiables' are displayed in all classrooms and these clearly spell out what is expected when pupils write. Pupils use these non-negotiables when checking their own work or that of other pupils.

Teachers use them when marking and setting pupils' targets to improve their

writing. Pupils are well used to a common approach throughout the school that requires them to plan their writing, draft it and check it before producing a final version.

- Pupils' spelling, punctuation and use of grammar have all improved in recent years because of teachers' concerted efforts to address weaknesses in these areas. Standards achieved by pupils at the end of key stage 2 are now higher than those seen nationally.
- The second area that I considered during the inspection was whether there is any difference in the effectiveness of teaching in the different key stages. I found no evidence of less effective teaching in any key stage or year. However, there remains some variation in the quality of teaching between subjects. Whereas teaching is consistently effective in English and mathematics in all years, it is less strong in some other subjects. The high expectations and tasks carefully matched to pupils' abilities evident in English and mathematics are not always evident in the teaching of other subjects.
- English is well taught in all years. Phonics teaching is particularly effective in key stage 1, and this helps pupils become confident readers. Pupils make good progress in both reading and writing in the early years, in key stage 1 and in key stage 2.
- Pupils make particularly strong progress in mathematics. Teachers focus well on developing basic number skills, while also encouraging pupils to think and reason when solving problems. In both 2016 and 2017, pupils made better progress by the end of Year 6 than that seen nationally.
- The next area that I considered was the quality of provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. The school has a higher-than-average proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. It is a fully accessible mainstream school (FAMS) and, as such, has several pupils with medical needs and/or physical disabilities. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities receive effective support in school to help them become independent learners. During the inspection, I observed several examples of pupils working independently because of support they had previously been given by staff. Through Parent View and in discussion with me, a small number of parents expressed reservations about the speediness of the support that their children had received. I found no evidence to support their concerns.
- Teachers regularly assess the progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and so quickly spot when a pupil is beginning to fall behind. Leaders then provide extra support to help them catch up. They also check on the impact that extra intervention is having. Pupils who continue to struggle are provided with increasing support, including from external professionals when appropriate. Consequently, most pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make good progress in school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' progress in reading and writing accelerates further so that it matches their very strong progress in mathematics
- the quality of teaching in all subjects matches the effective teaching already evident in English and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Alun Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and other members of your senior leadership team. I visited several classes with senior leaders, during which we observed teaching and learning and spoke with pupils about their work. I talked with many pupils in lessons and at breaktime and lunchtime. I met with three governors, including the chair of the governing body. I scrutinised several documents, including your self-evaluation, reports provided for governing body meetings, and safeguarding and child protection records. I talked with several parents as they dropped their children off at the start of the school day. I considered the 43 responses to Parent View, including the 26 free-text comments and the 42 responses from members of staff to the online inspection questionnaire.