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Mrs Emma Tovey
Principal
Barton Hill Academy
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Dear Mrs Tovey

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Barton Hill Academy

Following my visit to your school on 7 February 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in September 2017. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you, your two seconded vice-principals, two phase leads, the special educational needs coordinator, and both the mathematics and English leaders. I also held a meeting with four governors, including the chair of governors, two parents and a group of Year 6 pupils. I visited all classes with either you or together with your vice-principals. I also had a brief discussion with the chief executive officer of the Venturers Trust Board. We discussed the pupils' work on display and also looked at a sample of English and mathematics books. I considered a range of documents from school leaders which covered many aspects of the school's performance and the improvements which had been made. I also considered the recruitment procedures for staff new to the school since the inspection. The school's improvement plan and the trust's statement of action were also evaluated.

Since the inspection, you have been appointed permanently to the role of principal. At the start of term 3, you seconded a second vice-principal to support you in your

journey of improvement. Following the resignation of the special educational needs coordinator at the end of term 2, you internally promoted the mathematics leader to cover this role. His class responsibilities are being covered by a supply teacher. A nursery teacher also left at the end of term 2 and she has been replaced by extending the hours of a newly qualified teacher. One part-time teaching assistant retired at the end of term 2. You have appointed three temporary teaching assistants and one higher-level teaching assistant to permanent positions. Although numbers on roll remain at 433, there has been some pupil movement in and out of the school.

The quality of leadership and management at the academy

You demonstrate a determination and clarity of purpose which is already bringing about a shift in the culture of the school. You feel very well supported by the trust's head of academy improvement, members of the local governing body and the trustees of the academy, and welcome the challenge they provide. Nevertheless, given the academy improvement plan has been judged fit for purpose, you agree that the additional documentation needs to be streamlined in order to fully support you in the important role you play in academy improvement.

Following a legacy of sustained underachievement, you have quickly set about re-establishing the school's reputation within the local and wider community. You know that this will take time to rebuild. However, there are improved links with nearby nurseries and community groups.

Staff report that morale has improved because they feel that there is a more cohesive approach to the leadership of the school. They appreciate the way in which they now work as part of a team. Expectations are clear and they feel well supported through the wider professional development opportunities that are being made available to them.

The effective deployment of your seconded vice-principals, who have brought a wealth of expertise to the school, is supporting you well with school improvement. In particular, one vice-principal is providing high-quality coaching to teachers. Following a focused lesson observation, teachers are provided with training and opportunities for professional development. They are set targets for improvement and then observed again to check that they have made progress. This is steadily improving the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers also know that they must adhere to the agreed format for organising classroom displays to support pupils' learning. However, as yet, not all teachers expect their pupils to record their work to the standard expected by the school leaders.

There is now a consistent approach to evaluating the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across different subjects. Working alongside vice-principals, subject and phase leaders are gaining confidence in checking the quality of teaching to ensure that it has a positive impact on pupils' learning. They appreciate the time

that is now allocated for them to check teachers' planning, observe lessons, and review pupils' work in books. This is helping them to be better informed about pupils' progress through the school.

The effectiveness of teaching assistants is improving because you have provided training in safeguarding and in supporting pupils who are in the early stages of using English as an additional language. You have also helped some teaching assistants to improve the accuracy of their own spelling. You explain that teaching assistants appreciate the training they receive. They now have clear performance management targets which are linked to the impact of the support they provide. This has helped them to feel part of the team and valued. We both noted that in the lessons we visited, teaching assistants were actively involved in supporting pupils in their learning.

You and your leadership team have introduced a new approach to assessing pupils' progress. Regular tests check what the pupils have learned. These are moderated externally for consistency and this has brought accuracy to the school's internal assessment systems. Outcomes of these tests help teachers plan work which closely matches the needs of all their pupils. In particular, teachers are focusing on providing pupils with more opportunities to apply the knowledge they have gained to solve problems and provide reasoned explanations. Pupils are also given tailored packages of work to complete at home to reinforce learning and overcome their legacy of underachievement from previous years.

Improvements to the teaching of phonics have resulted in an acceleration of pupils' progress. The newly appointed leader for phonics has refreshed her own training, and is working closely with the English subject leader to support teachers in delivering high-quality sessions. Your focus on accelerating the progress that Year 1 boys make in phonics has led to the difference between their attainment and that of the girls closing. We noted that during a short visit to a phonics lesson in a Reception class the teacher used interesting objects to engage boys effectively.

The early years provision has undergone significant improvement. The selection of books available and the choice of dressing-up clothes for role play activities better reflect pupils' cultural backgrounds. A visual display which depicts all the children's cultural backgrounds is given pride of place. Improvements to the outdoor learning area are helping the children to develop their skills faster. For example, the addition of a climbing wall not only encourages the children to take risks, but also helps them to coordinate their physical skills. A new mud kitchen is a real success, especially with the boys who enjoy this messy play.

Since the inspection, there has been a review of the behaviour policy. You have introduced more rewards for those pupils whose behaviour is consistently good. You are confident that the policy is consistently applied by all staff. The detailed analyses you maintain show clearly that there has been a significant improvement in pupils' behaviour. During my visit, I noted that pupils behaved well in lessons. They

were engaged in their learning and responded to their teachers appropriately. I also noted that pupils moved in and around the school sensibly. Nevertheless, the group of pupils I met explained that they shared a perception that not everyone is treated fairly. You agreed that this should be looked into immediately and any issues of unfair treatment rectified.

External support

You are using the expertise in the local area well to support school improvement. Your vice-principals, seconded from two local good schools, are sharing their knowledge and expertise to coach and train your teachers. You have also made good use of the local authority's specialist team to improve your early years provision. You continue to use Bristol early years self-evaluation tool to identify further priorities for the Nursery and Reception classes.

Your aspiring leaders are receiving training from the Bristol Teaching Schools Alliance and your newly qualified teachers access support from the local authority school improvement team. The education welfare officer from the local authority provides effective support for the school's attendance manager.

You also link with other Venturers Trust academies for training events, to moderate work, and share initiatives.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local board of governors, the chief executive officer of the Venturers Trust Board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bristol. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lorna Brackstone
Her Majesty's Inspector