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Mrs Lesley Fisher-Pink
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Fisher-Pink

Short inspection of Birkbeck Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 February 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 June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You, ably supported by your deputy headteacher, provide strong leadership for the school. When your work with the school began in September 2016, you immediately recognised that standards needed to rise. The leadership team quickly identified improvements that were needed most urgently and made these changes. This resulted in substantial improvements in pupils' outcomes at the end of key stage 2 in 2017. You and your leadership team are united in your determination to continue the improvements for pupils. Parents and carers recognise this, with one parent saying, 'Due to the new management structure, this school has progressed in leaps and bounds.'

Both governors and the leadership team have a detailed knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Governors use a range of information to challenge and support leaders in making continuous improvements. For example, leaders and governors rightly identify the need to improve standards in boys' writing. While leaders are taking effective steps to secure the necessary improvements, more work is needed to diminish differences between boys and girls in their writing at key stage 2.

Leaders have worked hard to embed the school's values of 'resilience, respect and equality'. As a result, you have established a culture where the values run through all aspects of the school. Pupils are caring and respectful and collaborate well. They

are polite and courteous towards each other and to visitors. Pupils I spoke to said they use these values every day in their work. As one pupil put it: 'I never give up because I have learned to be resilient.'

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team and governors have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Robust systems and processes are in place and, as a result, all staff know how to report any safeguarding concerns. Records show that leaders follow up any issues carefully and swiftly, working well with external agencies to support vulnerable pupils.

All staff have received regular and appropriate safeguarding training that supports their understanding of the current statutory guidance. Leaders ensure that staff are kept up to date about potential risks in the local community. This enables staff to maintain high levels of vigilance to signs that a pupil may be vulnerable to harm.

Leaders complete the required checks to ensure that all staff are suitable to work in the school. These checks are recorded on the single central record which is updated and checked regularly by leaders and governors.

In my discussions with pupils, they told me they understand about different forms of bullying including online. They say that incidents of bullying are rare but if it does happen, they know what to do and a member of the staff will help them.

There is a strong safeguarding culture throughout Birkbeck. As a result, pupils say they feel safe at this school and the overwhelming majority of parents agree.

Inspection findings

- The first key line of enquiry I explored was the impact of leaders' work to improve the progress of reading for the most able pupils in key stage 2. This is to make sure that their progress in reading is at least as good as the progress they make in writing. In the 2017 end of key stage 2 assessments, most-able pupils did not make as much progress in reading as they did in writing, and their attainment was below national averages.
- You and the leadership team were quick to identify this and have introduced several strategies to secure improvements to pupils' reading outcomes, including for the most able pupils. This includes innovative approaches to teaching pupils how to infer and deduce the meaning of the texts they read. Teachers model strategies clearly and question pupils to check that they understand what they need to do. Through well-planned activities, pupils question each other about how the clues in the text help them understand what they read. As a result, pupils across key stage 2, including the most able, are able to explain their answers accurately and give reasons for their choices.
- Pupils I heard read are developing a love for literature and read with fluency and expression. They take account of punctuation when they read and this helps them to read for meaning. They all have favourite authors and can explain why.

For example, one pupil said: 'I like books by Anthony Horowitz because there are plenty of cliffhangers which make the story gripping.' Teachers ensure that pupils have access to high-quality texts and choose books which motivate them to read more than was the case in the past. As a result of the changes you and your team have made, pupils, including the most able among them, are making strong progress in reading.

- The second area that we agreed to investigate was how successfully leaders and teachers are improving the progress of boys' writing in key stage 2 so that they make as much progress as girls. This is because in the 2016 and 2017 key stage 2 assessments, boys' progress was not as strong as that of girls.
- You and your team have rightly prioritised the improvement of boys' writing. You have developed the curriculum so that pupils are able to practise writing across a range of subjects. Work in books shows that pupils routinely present their work well using neat handwriting.
- Teachers challenge pupils including boys to be ambitious and accurate in their use of vocabulary within sentences. As a result, over time, pupils' writing becomes more effective with, for example, words being chosen for their impact on the reader. Teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to write at length and improve the accuracy in their use of punctuation. Nevertheless, sometimes boys are unclear about what they need to do to be successful in their writing. In comparison to girls, they found it difficult to talk about what they had done well and say how their work is improving over time. This is limiting the progress of boys. Although pupils' writing is improving overall, leaders agree that further work is needed to diminish the differences between girls and boys.
- The third key line of enquiry focused on how successfully leaders are supporting teachers to deepen pupils' learning across the curriculum, particularly in history and geography. This was because applying the skills pupils had learned was an area for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Information on the school's website indicates that the school has tackled this effectively.
- The curriculum is rich and varied. Through the school's topic-based approach, pupils investigate and explore questions in depth. Teachers consider carefully how best to plan learning so pupils' knowledge and skills develop progressively in each subject. Teachers ensure that pupils deepen their understanding through well-chosen and demanding tasks. For example, in history, pupils had to decide whether a World War I soldier on trial for desertion was guilty or not. They evaluated a range of sources of information to draw conclusions and reach their verdict.
- The curriculum is extended well with a variety of experiences which deepen pupils' learning, for example through experts coming into school or visits to museums. Specialist teaching of football and dance and performance opportunities enrich pupils' experiences and encourage them to challenge their learning further. Pupils agree, saying that: 'Visits and performances help us better understand what we are learning about and develop an interest in new things.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- in writing, well-targeted teaching diminishes the differences between the achievements of boys and girls in key stage 2.

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

Yours sincerely

David Lloyd
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you, the deputy headteacher, other senior leaders, the chair of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. I visited classes with you, reviewed work in pupils' books and listened to pupils read. I observed pupils' behaviour around the school and at playtime, and talked with them informally in the playground. I talked with a range of staff and evaluated documentation including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, the single central record, and other safeguarding procedures and practices. I considered 112 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 22 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey.