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Mrs Susan Lymn-Brewin
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Dear Mrs Lymn-Brewin

Short inspection of Gotham Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 20 March 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.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

The school continues to be popular. Parents and carers value the work of the school. Pupils can explain the importance of respect and responsibility, which the school holds at the heart of its values. They enjoy learning but some pupils expressed concern at low-level disruption in some classes. Older pupils say that they relish the challenges teachers set for them but sometimes they find the work too easy. When teachers' expectations are high, pupils respond well in lessons. They know how well they are doing because of the gold, silver and bronze awards they receive. Pupils are enthusiastic about the range of visits and wider opportunities planned to stimulate their interest, such as 'Art Week'. One pupil said, 'Teachers provide a range of teaching styles to interest us.'

You work closely with your team of senior and middle leaders to continue to improve the school. You are developing your staff and leadership team through professional development. You have an enthusiastic and committed staff. You share your best practice with other schools.

Since the last inspection, you have improved the reading attainment of pupils of average ability. You have identified the priorities for improvement and the senior and middle leaders collect information to check the progress of pupils. Leaders check

pupils' learning so that they can improve the quality of teaching. There are, however, inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and not all new initiatives are equally effective. Leaders are not using the full range of evidence available to them to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning as accurately as they could. Your current evaluation of the school's work is not sufficiently clear about where improvements to teaching are still needed.

The governing body is knowledgeable about the school's priorities and regularly checks how well the school improvement plan is being implemented. Governors recognise that targets set for pupils' achievement are ambitious. However, without a more precise picture of the strengths and areas for improvement in teaching, they cannot make a sufficiently accurate evaluation about whether targets are likely to be achieved.

During the tour of the school, part of which we conducted together, it was clear that some tasks set by the teachers did not provide sufficient challenge for some groups of pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You are diligent in your approach to safeguarding. You use your breadth of knowledge well to engage a range of external support services to meet pupils' needs. The school's systems and procedures are robust.

Leaders have developed a strong and effective culture of safeguarding. Staff receive regular, good-quality training. They are knowledgeable about their responsibilities, are vigilant and confident to report any concerns about pupils' welfare. Leaders keep detailed and high-quality records of actions which have been taken to refer concerns to other agencies or to provide direct support to families. Leaders ensure that all checks on staff, volunteers and visitors are made to support the safety of pupils.

Most parents I spoke with, and most who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that their children are happy at school and feel secure. Pupils say that they are taught how to stay safe, including when using the internet. They feel safe in school and are confident to seek help if they have fallen out with other pupils. They trust their teachers and know that they can speak to them about any concerns they may have. However, they say that while they did not feel that there was bullying, they did express their concerns about poor behaviour in some lessons affecting their learning. A small minority of parents felt that poor behaviour by a few pupils is not dealt with effectively. During the inspection, skilled teaching assistants were seen supporting pupils who need more specific support with their behaviour.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I looked at the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in phonics. You have identified that pupils are not making sufficient progress in phonics. Observation of lessons and scrutiny of pupils' writing in the early years and key stages 1 and 2 showed that teaching was not helping pupils to catch up

as quickly as leaders believed. Where phonics is taught effectively, adults ensure that pupils say and record their sounds accurately. However, in other classes phonics is not being practised effectively in reading and writing. Teachers are not planning tasks to ensure that pupils, including the disadvantaged and the most able, make as much progress as they should. Pupils' work showed that some tasks do not challenge these pupils sufficiently.

- Progress in writing, by the end of key stage 2, has been in the bottom 20% of schools for at least two years. We looked at pupils' workbooks from several subjects. Where teaching is effective, pupils are given a broad range of opportunities to write. In addition, there is a systematic approach to the teaching of spelling, grammar and punctuation. However, some pupils who are capable of reaching the expected or higher standard by the end of Year 6 are not being given sufficient opportunities to practise and broaden their writing skills to enable them to make rapid progress. You are implementing new strategies for increasing pupils' progress in writing. However, this is not consistent.
- Discussions with subject leaders highlighted some shortcomings. They have not sufficiently developed their skills to make effective use of the information they collect from their monitoring activities. The school is developing its assessment system to provide information for teachers and leaders to check pupils' progress. However, the school's assessment system alongside monitoring activities are not yet providing a sufficiently comprehensive view of progress across the school for all groups of pupils.
- Pupils' absence and persistent absence have increased and are above those seen nationally. Governors and leaders are tackling this and have implemented a number of strategies. You are rightly challenging parents to make sure that their children attend every day unless they have an authorised reason for being absent. However, these strategies have not had sufficient impact. Attendance is still too low.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all staff are sufficiently well trained to ensure that all groups of pupils gain the phonic skills they need to make strong progress in reading and writing
- teachers adapt learning tasks to challenge all groups of pupils so that they make faster progress in writing, including the use of spelling, punctuation and grammar
- behaviour in lessons is improved to support effective learning for all pupils
- strategies to reduce absence result in much-improved rates of attendance.

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

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Moore
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and I also met with three governors, including the vice-chair of the governing body. I spoke with parents before school and with groups of pupils about their school experience. Jointly with you, I visited classes in key stage 2 and we sampled pupils' books. I visited classes in the early years and key stage 1, where I also looked at pupils' work and observed teaching. In addition, I checked the school's safeguarding arrangements and records, including the school's record of recruitment checks on staff. I also discussed safeguarding procedures with several members of staff. I looked at information about pupils' attendance. I evaluated the school's documentation about pupils' achievement and plans for improvement. I met with the English and mathematics subject leaders and with the coordinator for provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. I took account of 34 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, the five responses to the staff survey and 31 responses to the pupil survey.