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Mrs Sylvia Libson  
Executive Headteacher  
Furness Primary School  
Furness Road  
Harlesden  
London  
NW10 5YT

Dear Mrs Libson

### **Short inspection of Furness Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 20 September 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in June 2015.

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.

Since the school became an academy in 2016, there have been significant changes to the leadership team. You and the governors continue to have high expectations for staff and pupils. New leaders appointed from the partnership school in the trust have recently added strong capacity to the leadership team. Individually, leaders are sharply focused on improving pupils' outcomes. However, roles and responsibilities are not always as clear as they need to be. For example, there is no consistency in the range of ways that different leaders evaluate the progress that pupils make. While these evaluations are equally valid, a consistent approach would streamline work and lead to greater precision and accountability.

You and your staff have been successful in creating a calm, orderly environment at Furness. Pupils are unfailingly welcoming and friendly. They have a sincerity and honesty in their approach to school and to life, which is extremely endearing. They are respectful and polite. You and the staff ensure that pupils understand the value of education and that they work hard. There is a strong climate for learning across the school.

A small proportion of parents and carers shared their views with me during the inspection and through the online survey. Findings echo the school's own survey which shows that parents' views about the school are mixed. Leaders plan to work

alongside parents to further strengthen the perception of the school in the community, and to improve attendance.

You and your leadership team have identified the need to develop teaching and leadership further and, thus, improve outcomes for pupils. Observations undertaken with leaders during the inspection showed that monitoring of the quality of teaching is precise and accurate.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Pupils express confidence in their safety at school. They show awareness of the different forms of bullying and say that rare incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively. They are aware how to keep themselves safe online and in the local community. For example, they talked confidently about road safety and about telling an adult if something worries them on their journey home.

There is an effective system for reporting concerns, which is used to safeguard children. Leaders respond to the good advice that they receive from the Brent Schools Partnership to ensure that records are well kept and easy to access.

Staff receive appropriate and up-to-date training on safeguarding. Governors ensure that safer recruitment checks are carried out effectively and are committed to ensuring their own safeguarding training is updated appropriately. Designated safeguarding leaders are proactive in their work with outside agencies to ensure that vulnerable children or those at risk receive the support that they need.

The school site is kept safe and secure. Leaders and governors have taken appropriate action to close down the outside toilets, which were unsuitable for pupils' use.

### **Inspection findings**

- The first focus for the inspection was to look at the impact that leaders have on improving attendance. Although attendance is only slightly below the national average overall, the proportion of pupils who are frequently absent from school has remained well above the national average since the school became an academy. Many families live in challenging circumstances, and a higher proportion of pupils than average leave or join the school during the school year. Many pupils travel considerable distances to attend.
- The incidence of unauthorised absence means that too many pupils miss too much time at school, and this has an impact on their learning. Leaders responsible for improving attendance care deeply about supporting families to get their children to school. However, leaders do not shy away from hard messages and have issued fines when appropriate. They work in partnership with educational welfare officers to tackle poor attendance. They celebrate good attendance and have put in place a range of actions to try to reduce persistent absence. However, despite these efforts, there has been little improvement.

- Leaders and governors need to review their work to improve attendance in order to make sure that their approaches are appropriate for all parents and carers, so pupils attend as often as possible.
- We agreed to focus on the teaching of phonics in the early years and in Year 1. This is because there was a drop in the proportion of pupils who met the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2017. Leaders were pleased to report that this figure improved in 2018, when 85% of pupils achieved the expected standard.
- Inspection evidence showed that phonics teaching across early years and key stage 1 is variable. Teachers do not build effectively on the knowledge and skills that pupils have. For example, pupils who are competent and confident at writing simple sentences are sometimes given tasks which only require them to write very basic words. Occasionally, teachers rely too heavily on videos to demonstrate sounds and letters to children. This is not effective, because children choose not to look or say the sounds when directed by the video. Not all staff who teach phonics articulate sounds accurately, and there are weaknesses in subject knowledge.
- Our final agreed focus for the inspection was to consider how teachers across the school support pupils to make strong progress in reading. This is because the progress that pupils make in reading by the end of their time at Furness has declined overall since the academy opened.
- Your school improvement planning identifies the need to prioritise improvements to outcomes in reading. Leaders provide good models to staff on how to teach reading well. The oldest pupils benefit from skilled teaching of comprehension skills and make good progress.
- Overall, the quality of provision and teaching of reading lacks consistency. Teachers do not routinely inspire a love of reading and of books. Reading areas in classroom are often uninspiring. Leaders are keen to ensure that high-quality literature is used to stimulate a love of reading. However, some pupils said that their teachers only read to them during comprehension tasks. In contrast, pupils fondly remember an author visit that happened over a year ago, and report that 'it was great fun'.
- Teachers lack confidence in selecting books to meet the needs of all readers. Pupils sometimes read books which are either too difficult or too easy. Less-able readers struggle to apply their early phonics skills, and the most able readers read texts which do not stretch or challenge them.
- Information provided by leaders shows that the progress that pupils make over time reflects variability in the teaching of phonics and reading observed during the inspection.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that roles and responsibilities of leaders at all levels are reviewed and clarified to ensure that:

- the teaching of phonics and reading is good and leads to strong progress for pupils across the school
- attendance is at least in line with the national average and persistent absence is reduced
- communication with parents is strengthened so that they understand the strengths of the school, and the plans and actions taken to make it even better.

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 Brent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ruth Dollner  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you, governors and senior leaders. I spoke with a representative of the Brent Schools Partnership. I visited classrooms with the head of school and two leaders to observe and talk to pupils about their learning. I read with some pupils and reviewed assessment information to evaluate pupils' outcomes over time. I reviewed a range of safeguarding documentation. I spoke with a group of pupils separately, and a range of pupils as I walked around the school. I spoke to parents during the school day and I considered the 11 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire, Parent View. I discussed the school's own recent survey with leaders.