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22 May 2019

Mr Anthony Fitzpatrick  
Executive Headteacher  
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Barnwell  
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Dear Mr Fitzpatrick

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Barnwell School**

Following my visit to your school on 9 May 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received three successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- improve the quality of teaching and learning so they consistently challenge the pupils to ensure that they achieve as well as they are capable
- improve outcomes for pupils in science, by ensuring that teachers address the gaps in pupils' learning.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders and teachers, a group of pupils and the chair of the governing body. I held a telephone

conversation with the Hertfordshire improvement partner to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated and a range of documentation relating to school improvement was considered. I made brief visits to a number of lessons with your deputy headteacher. I also reviewed the single central record of checks on the suitability of staff, governors and volunteers to work with pupils.

## **Context**

You were appointed as the executive headteacher in September 2018, having previously been the headteacher. Subsequently, you have been seconded to the local authority for four days per week for the academic year as a project adviser. Since the previous inspection in January 2018, you have restructured the senior leadership team. An interim head of school has been appointed, a deputy headteacher and an assistant headteacher with responsibility for teaching, learning and assessment. A new pupil premium manager post has been created and appointed too. A new key stage 3 English coordinator has been appointed at middle leadership level and additional administrative support for attendance. Six teachers have left the school. There have also been changes to the new governing body, as new governors have joined.

An external review of pupil premium funding was carried out in October 2018, a special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) review in March 2019 and a science review in April 2019.

## **Main findings**

The school is on a journey of improvement. Although initially disheartened at the inspection judgements, staff at all levels of responsibility and governors have been proactive in embracing the opportunity to probe their practice further.

You and your leadership team have prioritised well, stabilised staffing and implemented effective systems and procedures. You have set higher expectations for staff and pupils since the previous inspection. Leaders at all levels are honest in their appraisal of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, they know the school well and use this understanding to inform effective strategic decision making. A number of staff are new to their roles but demonstrate true commitment.

Leaders are committed to improving the quality of education that the school provides. They have introduced various strategies that are having a positive impact and raising pupils' achievement. Rigorous systems to check the quality of teaching and assessment are now in place. Leaders use findings from their observations of teaching to help identify suitable training for staff. Although improving, outcomes remain variable across the school because teaching does not consistently challenge all groups of pupils. You have already identified this area for improvement, and this aspect of the school's work features strongly in your plans for the academic year.

The work of middle leaders has gained momentum. They are now more effective in their roles, taking greater responsibility for the quality of teaching and the progress of pupils in their subject areas. This is because, since January 2018, they, and other members of staff, have engaged in bespoke training and professional development, which is helping to improve skills. Leaders have also implemented effective procedures to monitor the performance of staff. Staff are rising to the challenge and the quality of teaching and learning is improving as a result.

Teachers across the curriculum, in accordance with the school's marking policy, are now providing feedback consistently to pupils about how they can improve their work.

In response to the previous inspection report, leaders and governors have taken steps to strengthen the leadership of science. Teachers in science benefit from appropriate training. You have recently sought an external evaluation of the school's science provision. Leaders are using this review to begin to embed a more thorough analysis of their own impact. In the past, governors have not used such information to challenge leaders thoroughly enough. Although the teaching of science is beginning to improve, you are under no illusion that some pupils have endured a legacy of weaker teaching. As a result, teaching has not been strong enough to address the gaps in pupils' knowledge.

At the previous inspection, a weakness identified by inspectors was the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND. Leaders are now targeting support more precisely for individuals to overcome the specific barriers they have to achievement. Teachers are also starting to use this information effectively to plan learning that meets the specific needs of individual pupils.

You have commissioned an external review of the use of pupil premium funding, to identify potential weaknesses in your work, and have acted quickly on its recommendations. The additional funding received is being allocated with increasing effectiveness and is now routinely monitored for its impact.

Pupils behave in a calm and orderly way as they move around the school site. They are well behaved in their lessons. In part, this is because they share positive relationships with their teachers and because of the warm, inclusive environment, which encourages pupils to strive for success.

Senior leaders have acted quickly to reduce the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school. There have been considerable improvements in this area. Following the previous inspection, you have revamped the strategies used to monitor and improve pupils' attendance. You have improved communication with parents to ensure that pupils and their families understand the importance of good attendance. Staff ensure that pupils who struggle to get to school every day are given appropriate support. The proportion of pupils regularly absent from school has

decreased during this academic year.

Pupils speak confidently about the changes that have been introduced to improve the school. Pupils say that they feel safe and appreciate the support, care and guidance they receive from staff.

The governing body continues to raise the level of challenge it provides to you and your leadership team. Governors have provided the right level of support to assist, and added the necessary leadership capacity following the previous inspection. For example, they have created a new post with responsibility for pupil premium. There is an open and honest dialogue between senior leaders and governors to ensure that they hold you to account diligently. Governors are not over-reliant on leaders for information about the school. Leaders are well supported by governors, who are committed to improving the provision for pupils so they achieve well.

You have taken the time to refine your school development plan so that the areas for improvement are specifically targeted to getting the school to good. The regular monitoring and evaluation of your plan is helping to keep improvements on track.

There is no doubt that governors and staff are more determined than ever to make Barnwell school a good school. Together, you form a strong team with the capacity needed to continue the school's journey of improvement. You are realistically aware of the improvements that still remain and resolute in achieving them.

### **External support**

Leaders at every level are keen to benefit from and act upon recommendations made following external support. These have provided useful feedback that has helped to shape the school's improvement plans. Support from the local authority has been effective. Advisers provide external checking to help leaders progress and adapt plans where necessary. The Hertfordshire improvement partner provides effective support to the school. Her close involvement over time has enabled her to provide guidance in relation to different areas of the school's work.

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

Yours sincerely

Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**