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Mrs Julia Belshaw
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Dear Mrs Belshaw

Short inspection of Barnes Infant Academy

Following my visit to the school on 25 April 2017, 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 April 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Leaders take pride in ensuring that pupils experience a broad curriculum which establishes effective learning habits from an early age. Pupils I spoke with indicated that they love their school because adults plan activities which excite and motivate them. As one pupil commented, 'Going to school is the best job in the world, because you get to learn.' Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Almost all of those who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire highlighted the approachability of staff and praised the quality of education their children receive. One parent's comment reflected the views expressed by several families, 'Friendly staff with extremely friendly, happy and hardworking pupils. It is a pleasure to send my son to Barnes where I know he is happy and enjoys learning.'

Since the previous inspection, you have maintained the above average standards achieved by children across the early years. A higher than average proportion of children meet and exceed the expected levels of development for their age by the end of the Reception Year. You identified that boys were not achieving as well as girls and implemented a range of actions which have resulted in improved outcomes for boys this year. You recognise, however, that occasionally, the tasks set for children when they work independently do not challenge middle-ability and most-able children as well as they could.

A higher than average proportion of pupils reach the expected standard for their age

across key stage 1 in all subjects. This is as a result of middle and senior leaders' work to secure consistently good teaching, which matches work well to pupils' needs and interests. Since the previous inspection, you have sustained the high proportion of pupils reaching the highest levels of attainment in reading. You recognised that, in 2016, not enough pupils reached the highest levels of attainment in writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2. You have quickly addressed this and pupils' current work shows that more of them are now working at greater depth across key stage 1.

Leaders have made good use of pupil premium funding to secure important improvements to outcomes for pupils. More disadvantaged pupils are now reaching the nationally expected levels at the end of the early years and key stage 1. You have significantly reduced the persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils, which had previously been too high. You are aware, however, that you have still more to do to support middle-attaining pupils who are disadvantaged, to make more rapid progress across key stage 1 to reach the higher levels of attainment.

The previous inspection tasked you with developing the expertise of middle leaders. You have formed a strong team of senior and middle leaders who share your vision for the school. They work effectively with you to drive improvement to the quality of teaching and learning. Leaders at all levels, including governors, know the school well and are ambitious for the future of the school. However, at times, your evaluation of pupils' assessment information could be more incisive to enable sharper targets for improvement to be set in your school development plan.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff demonstrate good knowledge of recent safeguarding guidance through the regular training they receive. Leaders are tenacious in following up safeguarding concerns with the local authority and keep meticulous records of their actions.

Pupils feel safe in school. They behave well because staff have high expectations of them. They are confident that bullying is not tolerated in their school. Pupils are proud to explain the importance of their 'Barnes Values', which promote respect, positive attitudes to learning and personal responsibility for keeping safe. Staff exploit every opportunity to encourage pupils to consider their safety and consequently pupils have a well-developed understanding of risk. For example, pupils in Year 1 can articulate the potential safety issues when they are working online and the actions they take to help them to stay safe.

Inspection findings

- In this inspection, I was interested to see whether teaching was meeting the needs of pupils, especially the middle-attaining and most-able pupils, in writing and mathematics, in key stage 1. You have introduced a new approach to assessing writing, which is allowing teachers to identify gaps in pupils' skills more precisely and plan to address them. Teachers are spending more time ensuring that pupils have the technical skills they need in handwriting, spelling, punctuation and grammar, but

recognise the importance of inspiring pupils with a love of writing. For example, pupils in Year 1 were having great fun creating their own designs in response to the text, 'The Queen's Knickers', but were clear about the purpose of their writing and the technical features that were necessary. Pupils' workbooks show that they are making good progress with their writing. In particular, the most able pupils are making rapid progress. The proportion of pupils working at the higher levels has improved this academic year.

- Similarly, in mathematics, you have introduced a new scheme of work to provide more opportunities for pupils to practise their problem-solving skills and to develop their confidence and fluency with numbers. Teachers undertake thorough assessments, which allow them to plan the work that pupils need precisely. As a result, the proportion of pupils working at the expected levels for their age is above average and the proportion of pupils working at greater depth has improved.
- While pupils with high prior attainment are making much better progress across key stage 1, you recognise that not enough middle-attaining pupils are making faster progress to reach the higher levels of attainment. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils. You, your leadership team and the governing body are aware of this and are making plans to address it.
- Leaders have been extremely successful in raising the attainment of boys in the Reception Year. Adults have carefully considered the interests of boys and developed their enthusiasm for learning through well-planned topics. A relentless focus on the development of children's fine motor skills and letter formation has paid off. Tasks led directly by adults are extremely challenging and promote children's investigative and problem-solving skills well. Children are making strong progress across the early years from their starting points and the proportion of boys working at the expected levels for their age has increased. However, the tasks set for children when they work independently do not always provide enough challenge for some of the middle- and higher-attaining children. You recognise that you need to address this, so that achievement is outstanding in the early years.
- You have made good use of pupil premium funding to secure stronger attendance from disadvantaged pupils. The family liaison officer is tenacious in following up non-attendance and engages well with external agencies to tackle persistent absenteeism. As a result, the persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils is extremely low this academic year.
- Pupil premium funding has also been used well to give disadvantaged children the best start to their school life. Regular sessions for families of children in the early years have helped parents to support their children with reading and other aspects of their development. The appointment of a specialist in speech and language, alongside additional training, has helped staff to improve children's communication and language skills. As a result, more disadvantaged children in the Reception Year are currently working at the expected level for their age.
- You have provided good support for middle and senior leaders to develop the skills they need to fulfil their roles effectively. External consultants and advisers have helped leaders to ensure that they evaluate the quality of teaching accurately. New leaders have benefited from external training and show a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Middle leaders undertake regular observations of

teaching and scrutinise pupils' work to check their learning. Working closely with the two newly appointed assistant headteachers, leaders of English and mathematics have secured notable improvements in the teaching of writing and mathematics.

- Leaders know the school well. In particular, the assistant headteachers have a clear picture of the achievement of every pupil and use this information to hold teachers to account through regular performance meetings. However, leaders' written summary of self-evaluation does not evaluate incisively enough the school's work, particularly in relation to the outcomes achieved by pupils. Analysis is overly focused on the broad proportions of pupils working at expected or exceeding levels, rather than forensically reviewing the progress of pupils from different starting points. As a consequence, some of the targets set within the school development plan lack the sharpness needed so that leaders can fulfil their ambition to move the school to outstanding.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- more middle-attaining pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, make faster progress across key stage 1, to reach the highest levels of attainment by the end of Year 2
- activities set for children in the Reception Year when they work independently provide sufficient challenge for the most able and for those working at the standards typically expected for their age
- leaders' evaluation of their work is incisive, enabling more precise targets to be set to improve the performance of the school to outstanding.

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

Yours sincerely

Claire Brown
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you and other members of the leadership team. I also met with the chair and the vice-chair of the governing body and three other governors. I visited classrooms to observe teaching and to look at pupils' work. In a number of classrooms, I observed teaching jointly with you and with other leaders. I spoke formally to a group of pupils. I scrutinised the work in pupils' books alongside senior leaders. I evaluated information in relation to pupils' progress, the school self-evaluation document, the school development plan and your arrangements for checking the performance of teachers. I reviewed the documentation linked to your work to keep

pupils safe and examined the information and policies on the school's website. The 70 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) and a handwritten note submitted by a parent were considered.