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Ms Sandra Delapenha-Chin
Headteacher
Benthal Primary School
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Dear Ms Delapenha-Chin

Following my visit to the school on 27 September 2016, 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 April 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The school has had significant leadership changes since the last inspection, including a new chair of governors. You are the second headteacher in post since the last inspection and there have been many other staff changes. We agreed at the start of the inspection that I would consider the effect of these changes as one of my key lines of enquiry.

Since appointment, you have brought calm and stability to the school; it is clear that you have the confidence of parents and staff. Parents who I spoke to informally at the start of the day were effusive in their praise for the school. You have worked closely with senior leaders, middle leaders and governors to ensure that a good standard of education has been maintained. Your governors are knowledgeable, fully involved in the school's work and offer you strong strategic support. Together you have steered the school through a challenging time. Such is your dedication to the school community that you have delayed your own retirement to ensure that a succession plan is in place. This year, a head of school has been appointed to work in tandem with you to ensure continuity.

Classrooms are attractive places for learning and are well managed. The school is subject to consultation about possible relocation as part of the local authority's building plans. While I appreciate the uncertainty that this is causing, some communal parts of the school building and grounds are untidy and poorly maintained. These include the internal courtyards and natural areas. We agreed that these do not promote the same high standards of learning that are present in the classrooms.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are appropriately detailed and of high quality. All checks for the recruitment of staff suitable to work with children are in place. The designated safeguarding lead is well known to all and procedures are clearly understood and followed. Clear systems are in place for making referrals when concerns arise. Links with external agencies are strong, including with the local authority designated office for safeguarding.

Pupils report that they feel safe in school and know they are listened to when raising a concern.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain that the school remained good, one of my key lines of enquiry was about writing. Test results in 2015 had suggested that disadvantaged low-attaining pupils in key stage 1 were not making enough progress in key stage 2. You agreed, and told me that your leadership team had already identified this as a key priority for the school.
- On visiting classrooms, it became clear that a wide range of good writing opportunities are available across the curriculum. Progress in writing is visible in pupils' books across year groups; pupils benefit from editing their work and responding to teachers' marking. However, we agreed that the most able pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds could be given greater challenge in their writing tasks. At present, there are not enough opportunities for them to write more extended pieces in a greater variety of writing styles.
- My observations in lessons and pupils' books support the improvements seen in the provisional 2016 results. These show that 74% of pupils attained the expected standard for writing and 19% attained at a greater depth than this.
- You have shown a commitment to raise this further through joining a local authority based support programme to raise the attainment of reading and writing.
- My second line of enquiry was about reading. This was because provisional 2016 results show that only 43% of pupils reached the expected standard in reading at the end of Year 6. You were disappointed, but you took immediate action. Your leadership team has worked closely with the local authority school improvement partner to put strategies in place to address this. This includes a new reading scheme across key stage 2 and a 20-week programme to support less confident readers. Greater challenge for the most able readers from disadvantaged backgrounds to attain higher levels of attainment is a significant part of this work.
- Through inspection, I found that key stage 1 pupils are being taught to use a wide range of strategies to support their reading. Phonics is taught well.

- I found that the more rigorous and robust reading programme across key stage 2 is extending reading opportunities for pupils.
- Adults listen to pupils read more frequently through guided sessions. The teaching of reading has a clearer focus on inference and deduction to support comprehension skills.
- New programmes have also been introduced to focus on the learning needs of less confident readers. This is beginning to show strong improvement.
- To improve further, we agreed that the most able pupils could be better challenged by a wider range of genre and more ambitious texts.
- My final line of enquiry was about attendance. The most recent published information suggested that particular groups of pupils were persistently absent much more than is the case nationally. Discussions with school leaders and scrutiny of records quickly explained why individual pupils were absent. I am content that the school has strong and effective strategies in place to monitor and improve attendance.

Next steps for the school

- Increase the challenge and raise expectations in writing for the most able pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds by encouraging them to write more extended pieces in a greater variety of writing styles.
- Ensure that the most able pupils are better challenged by reading a wider range of genres and more ambitious texts.
- Ensure that all communal areas of the school promote high standards of learning, and that any proposed future school relocation does not detract from continued good standards of education at Benthall Primary School.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the director of children's services for Hackney. This letter will also be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tom Canning
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held several meetings with you and the head of school. I met with representatives of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I met with the special educational needs coordinator and safeguarding

lead and also the office staff who deal with personnel procedures and attendance. I scrutinised the school's safeguarding procedures with the business manager. I met with middle leaders representing early years, English, reading and mathematics. Your leader for English and your head of school accompanied me on my visits to classrooms. I talked to pupils about their learning; I looked at their books and listened to a range of pupils read in Year 2 and Year 6. I also looked at the online surveys completed by staff and pupils and I viewed the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I had conversations with parents and carers at the beginning of the day.

Inspection activities focused on the action that the school is taking to ensure that disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as they should, particularly the most able. I also looked at actions that the school is taking to ensure that all pupils are making the progress they are capable of in reading and writing.