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Mrs Ashley Emmerson  
Headteacher  
Barnwell Academy  
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DH4 7RT

Dear Mrs Emmerson

### **Short inspection of Barnwell Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 31 January 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 October 2012.

### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since taking up the post of substantive headteacher in September 2015, you have remodelled the senior leadership team to include a wider range of highly capable practitioners. All members of the leadership team have a strong and clear vision for the pupils and the school. Leaders have developed a school in which the vision statement of 'learning together and having fun' rings true.

Governance is much stronger too. Governors are highly skilled individuals who are well equipped to support and challenge senior leaders effectively. They make it their business to access training to build up their knowledge and expertise. For example, governors appreciated the training about the school's published assessment information, RAISEonline, which you delivered recently. They look forward to receiving their termly data packs, take time to study the information provided and prepare searching questions to ask you at full governing body and committee meetings.

You identified subject leadership as a developing aspect of leadership and management. Subject leaders, through your support and guidance, are improving their ability to analyse assessment information rigorously and put in place initiatives to improve provision.

Leaders have done much to address the areas for development identified at your predecessor school's last inspection. You have established an accurate and reliable system to track the achievement of individual pupils, cohorts of pupils and groups of pupils in key stages 1 and 2. Pupils in key stage 2 have become more independent. They access their own resources readily and utilise a range of taught strategies before asking for help from their teachers. Teachers' skills in asking thought-provoking and challenging questions have also improved. Most pupils now give an answer and the reason for their answer as a matter of course.

Teachers are more adept at setting work at just the right level for pupils to make rapid progress, especially in upper key stage 2. The 2016 cohort of Year 6 pupils made exceptional progress in reading and writing during their four years in key stage 2.

However, pupils' achievement in mathematics is still not as strong as their achievement in reading and writing, especially for the most able pupils and most able disadvantaged pupils.

Children feel safe and secure in the welcoming early years unit. Teachers and parents work in partnership to ensure that the children make good progress. Parents who attended a family learning workshop during the inspection were effusive in their praise of the opportunities provided by the school.

Leaders' knowledge of children's attainment on entry to the early years is not yet robust. Not every child, in every area of learning and development in the early years, enters the school 'well below or below expectations' as leaders' self-evaluation of the school's effectiveness states.

Pupils are knowledgeable about the different forms that bullying can take and are confident that adults sort out the rare occurrences of bullying straight away. The overwhelming majority of parents agree with their views.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Recruitment checks are thorough and recorded accurately.

You, as designated person for child protection, are tenacious at following up multi-agency referrals to ensure that vulnerable pupils and their families access support in a timely fashion. You have also successfully put in place many initiatives to improve pupils' attendance further and reduce the number of pupils who are persistently absent or who arrive late for school.

Pupils have a thorough knowledge of how to keep themselves safe online. They know not to share personal information, including photographs, with strangers and understand that privacy settings are essential. Key stage 2 pupils deliver an online safety and e-learning assembly to their peers and their families on an annual basis.

The content informs both pupils and parents.

### **Inspection findings**

- Leaders have ensured that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their individual starting points. Parents are fulsome in their praise of the cooperative work between the Barnwell Academy Day Care and the school. They say that their children who have specific special educational needs and/or disabilities make a seamless transition between settings.
- The coordinator for special educational needs (SENCo) tracks the progress made by pupils diligently. Leaders act upon her advice to establish bespoke provision for individuals and groups of pupils. For example, staff deliver a range of basic learning skills successfully to a small number of pupils in a newly created and nurturing provision called 'the hub'.
- The SENCo has worked effectively to support pupils with behavioural difficulties. This has led to a reduction of incidents of poor behaviour in certain classes and throughout the school as a whole. Pupils have noticed a difference. They say that their learning is now much less likely to be disrupted by other pupils' poor behaviour.
- Attendance has high priority in school. You have taken assertive action to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils further. As a result, their attendance, which was 94% in January 2016, has increased to 95.7% this year.
- The early years indoor and outdoor environments are well organised and provide plentiful opportunities for children to learn as they play. Children in the early years make good progress from their starting points. However, leaders find it difficult to assess precisely how much progress because of their belief that the children enter the nursery below or well below the expectations for their age.
- Leaders have acted upon the advice and guidance of the school's educational development partner to develop the outdoor learning environment to encourage independence. During the inspection for example, a child in the Reception class spent an extended period of time making 'soup' in the outdoor mud kitchen, having gathered what she called her 'ingredients' from the nearby shrubbery. She talked through each step in the process confidently as she went along.
- Pupils do not make as much progress in mathematics as they do in reading and writing; this is especially true for pupils, including the most able pupils, in key stage 1. In October 2016, following detailed research, the subject leader for mathematics introduced a new system for teaching mathematics in Years 1 and 2. Although this is still a very new initiative, the school's most recent assessment information indicates that pupils in key stage 1 are currently making better progress in mathematics than they did last year.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they have an accurate understanding of children's attainment on entry to the early years and know the proportions of children who enter the setting below, at, and above the expectations expected for their age in each area of learning and development.
- subject leaders are given more opportunities to support their colleagues in delivering new initiatives, such as mathematics in key stage 1, successfully.
- pupils, including the most able pupils, make good or better progress in mathematics across the school, but especially in key stage 1.

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

Belita Scott  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I discussed the work of the school with you, other members of the senior leadership team, subject leaders and five governors, including the chair of the governing body. I checked a range of documentation including leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness. I examined information about pupils' achievement together with external evaluations of aspects of the school's work and minutes of meetings of the governing body. I considered 59 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View), 14 responses to the pupil questionnaire and 18 responses to the staff questionnaire. I visited classes to observe teaching, learning and assessment, alongside you. I checked the progress made by pupils in their workbooks, talked formally to a group of six pupils and talked more informally to pupils in lessons and at breaktime about their learning. I also listened to pupils from Years 1 and 3 read.