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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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28 September 2017

Mr John Smith
Executive Principal
The Baird Primary Academy
Parker Road
Hastings
East Sussex
TN34 3TH

Dear Mr Smith

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of The Baird Primary Academy

Following my visit to your school on 20 September 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in January 2017. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, I held several meetings with you and the principal. I also met with the chair of the local governing board, and two senior representatives of the University of Brighton Academies Trust. I also met with subject leaders, teachers and support staff, as well as with a group of pupils. I spoke informally with parents at the start of the day. The trust's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated. I also reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, information about pupils' progress and records of visits by trust officers. I reviewed safeguarding procedures by examining the single central record and by discussing the school's child protection policy with you.

Context

A number of changes have taken place since the last inspection. On 1 September 2017, the Hastings Academies Trust merged with the University of Brighton Academies Trust. The trust also carried out a governance review, which resulted in

revised terms of reference and a new scheme of delegation for the local governing board. Two new assistant principals have been appointed following a review of leadership arrangements in the school.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Working with the principal, you have wasted no time in getting to grips with the areas for improvement that were identified at the last inspection. You have built on the emerging strengths in leadership noted at the time. Staff, parents and pupils appreciate the stability and clarity of direction you have brought to the school since your arrival. You are both highly visible presences in the school, bringing energy and a strong sense of moral purpose to your roles.

The University of Brighton Academies Trust provides effective challenge and support. The recent review of governance has created clearer lines of communication and accountability. You and the principal are held to account by the newly formed education and standards committee, which in turn reports directly to the trust board. Experienced officers carry out rigorous checks on standards in the school. The trust has invested wisely in improvements to the fabric and appearance of the school, and has provided funds for additional staffing. A local governing board oversees links with the community and checks that agreed safeguarding policies are followed. The trust's statement of action is appropriately detailed and contains helpful milestone targets. Trustees review and update it at regular intervals. You have supplemented the statement of action with a school improvement plan that provides clear and pertinent short- and medium-term targets. However, some of the measures by which you aim to evaluate the impact of your actions lack precision.

Following the last inspection, you rightly reviewed the school's leadership arrangements so that you could hold leaders more closely to account for the progress pupils make. You have ensured that new leadership roles, for example that of pupil premium champion, focus sharply on pupils' outcomes. Subject leaders confirm that you hold them to account stringently. At the same time, you take account of their views when planning next steps. For example, you appointed a qualified speech therapist to support pupils with communication difficulties in the light of evidence provided by your special educational needs team.

You and the principal have been successful in raising teachers' and pupils' expectations of what can be achieved. Provisional results of national assessments for 2017 suggest that pupils' attainment at key stage 1, including that of disadvantaged pupils, will be close to national figures, having been below national averages in 2016. The proportion of pupils in Year 1 who reached the expected standard in phonics rose sharply, but remains below the national average. While attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at key stage 2 was below national averages, pupils' progress from their starting points improved markedly in 2017. As a result, it is likely that the school will have met the government's floor standards

when validated results are published later in the year. The school's own assessment information for 2016/17 shows that, in most year groups, increasing proportions of pupils made rapid progress in English and mathematics as the year went on. Progress was less secure for pupils in Years 5 and 6, for whom there were significant gaps in their knowledge, as a result of weaker teaching in previous years.

Outcomes in the early years continue to improve. In 2017, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, was in line with last year's national average. The trust has invested significantly in resources and accommodation for the early years. The indoor and outdoor areas are bright and welcoming, while new equipment and resources stimulate children's imagination. Adults make increasingly skilful use of questions to extend children's language and mathematics skills. For example, in the play kitchen a teacher challenged children to select appropriate implements, asking, 'Which spoon do you think we need for the beans?'

Since the last inspection, you and the principal have focused relentlessly on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Teachers and support staff say that the training they receive is well matched to their needs and that it has improved their skills. When teachers plan activities that take account of what pupils already know or can do, pupils make rapid progress. However, you recognise that teaching across the school remains inconsistent. Not enough teaching provides the degree of challenge that pupils, including those who are most able, need to make the progress of which they are capable. The trust has recently brought in a structured approach to teaching and learning, and has provided well-received staff training for it. Although it has only been in place since the start of term, teachers say that this framework for planning and teaching is already helping them to meet pupils' needs more effectively.

At the last inspection, inspectors found that pupils gave up too easily when challenged in their learning. As a result of the effective action you and the principal have taken, pupils now show considerably more resilience. Attractive corridor displays stimulate pupils' interest in English, mathematics and the wider curriculum. Pupils increasingly relish and rise to the challenges that their teachers set them, selecting more difficult tasks that require them to explain their answers in more detail. In addition, pupils enjoy the extended homework tasks that accompany their termly topics. For example, pupils in Year 6 look forward to inventing their own spy gadgets later this term. Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They are polite and courteous to visitors. Most pupils take pride in their work. However, as you acknowledge, there is more to do to ensure that all pupils have consistently positive attitudes to their learning. You have worked with staff to agree a new set of values that encourage pupils to 'fly high.' It is too early to see the impact of this initiative, but early signs are promising.

Attendance remains stubbornly low, in particular for disadvantaged pupils, and is well below the national average for primary schools. You and your colleagues

highlight the importance of regular attendance in newsletters and classroom displays and through a range of rewards and incentives. You work productively with the parents of pupils who are frequently absent, going the extra mile to remove any barriers that may prevent pupils attending school regularly. At the same time, you have not shied away from challenging families whose children do not come to school often enough, for example by issuing fines. You have had some success in improving the attendance of some of the most persistent absentees, but you recognise that pupils' absence remains too high.

As well as the substantial support that the trust provides, you have also made effective use of support from elsewhere. For example, a local teaching school has supported you in making improvements to the mathematics curriculum. The Baird has also been a key player in a local initiative concerned with pupils' well-being through the Hastings Education Improvement Partnership.

In order to address the issues identified in this visit, sponsors, governors and leaders should take further action to:

- increase the level of challenge in lessons, so that all pupils, in particular most-able pupils, make rapid and sustained progress in their learning
- ensure that pupils who are most frequently absent come to school more regularly so that overall attendance figures match the national average for primary schools.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

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

Yours sincerely

Gary Holden
Her Majesty's Inspector