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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mr D Meades
Principal
Barton Junior School
Barton Road
Dover
Kent
CT16 2ND

Dear Mr Meades

Short inspection of Barton Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 5 December 2018, 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 October 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Collectively, you, the academy board, senior leaders and members of the multi-academy trust (MAT) have a strong vision for pupils to thrive and succeed. The mission, 'To inspire, motivate and challenge pupils, establishing a safe and stimulating environment... rooted in mutual respect', influences all of the school's activities. You know the school well and are ambitious for all pupils to achieve their potential. Parents and carers and the wider community are confident that senior leaders will develop the school further.

The previous inspection recognised strengths in leadership, teaching, pupils' achievements and behaviour. These successes have been strengthened further. The progress of pupils was highlighted as an aspect to improve. Staff work in partnership with other local schools to share good teaching practice, and new teaching resources have been purchased. Pupils' progress is carefully tracked and individual pupils are given effective support. As a consequence, pupils' progress is strengthening. However, as you have recognised, more pupils need to attain the higher standards in reading and mathematics.

Senior leaders have comprehensive procedures for school improvement planning. Pupils' progress and the standards of attainment overall, including outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, are slightly above national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. The academy board has been restructured recently to ensure that the school's successes and weaknesses are monitored rigorously, and that resources are

used even more effectively to raise standards. As we discussed, however, there is more to be done in this respect.

Leaders have organised a broad and exciting curriculum that provides a range of first-hand learning opportunities. These are relevant to and welcomed by pupils. For example, pupils visit the Roman Museum in Dover when learning about this period of history. They also practise their orienteering skills in Dover's Connaught Park. Pupils learn about the importance of faith in a crisis, when learning about the Second World War, and develop their artistic skills through the designing and making of pottery plates.

During visits to classrooms, we saw examples of enthusiastic and focused teaching that engaged pupils in a range of learning activities. We observed some pupils calculating the missing angles in a variety of geometric shapes and other pupils working together to solve problems by interpreting timetables. Year 5 pupils were absorbed in the poem 'The Highwayman' by Alfred Noyes and learned new vocabulary. Year 4 pupils took part in a chocolate-making workshop, applying their literacy and numeracy skills. Teachers and learning mentors question pupils skilfully to help them reflect on their work and move their learning forward. Pupils benefit from working together and from opportunities to discuss activities and their learning. As a result of effective teaching, the majority of pupils across the school are making strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

Staff care for pupils well, and know them and their families as individuals. The parent-support worker and other staff work together effectively as a team. They make sure that pupils and families get help as and when it is needed. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including those with social, emotional and mental health needs, are supported to participate fully in all of the school's activities. Pupils are enthusiastic and polite. They speak thoughtfully and confidently about their school. The vast majority of pupils behave well and enjoy learning. Pupils say that they appreciate the opportunities organised by teachers. However, some pupils say that they would like to be challenged even more.

Leaders provide a range of extra-curricular activities. One parent commented, 'The school provides lots of activities for the children with lots of involvement.' Pupils enjoy activities such as the breakfast and after-school clubs, playing the guitar, choir, netball, rugby and taking part in a wide range of other whole-school activities such as Buster's book club and the recent trip to the pantomime. These opportunities support pupils' learning effectively and contribute to their strong personal development.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose. Pupils' overall well-being is a key focus for the school. As a result of routine safeguarding training, staff understand their responsibility to keep pupils safe. Staff know what to do should they have a concern about a pupil and the importance of taking swift action. Leaders ensure that up-to-date and detailed records are maintained. Staff,

including the parent-support worker, collaborate well with outside agencies to provide effective help for pupils and their families. This support is appreciated by parents.

The vast majority of parents find staff to be welcoming and are confident that any concerns they raise will be addressed. There is a wide range of useful information for parents on the school's website, including advice about online safety, staying safe in the sun and how to support learning at home. The majority of parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, are confident that their children are safe at school and cared for well.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe when taking part in the broad selection of activities arranged by staff. Pupils know the importance of 'Be bright, be seen' when near roads, and how to stay safe when using computers. Pupils speak articulately about the importance of not sharing their personal information online or with strangers. Pupils are happy to talk to staff if they have a concern at home or in school and are very confident that their problems will be addressed. Incidents of bullying and racism are rare, but leaders have systems in place to respond promptly and effectively. Consequently, pupils are safe and say that they feel safe.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection we agreed to focus on the progress of most-able pupils, including most-able disadvantaged pupils, in reading and mathematics and how effectively leaders have reversed the previous downward trend in attendance.
- The curriculum is organised in topics around popular children's literature, including, for example, 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' and 'The Ice Palace'. Pupils appreciate the wide range of exciting texts provided. Parents welcome the range of home activities linked to these topics to help them support their children's learning. Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, say that lessons are fun and that they enjoy reading. They read widely and choose their books carefully. Pupils increasingly read with expression and discuss literature thoughtfully, making references to the text as needed. Staff ask questions to extend pupils' vocabulary. However, as we discussed, the most able do not choose challenging literature and sometimes make basic errors. Consequently, too few most-able pupils are attaining the higher standards in reading.
- Leaders have revised the school's approach to teaching mathematics, in line with a new curriculum. Extra resources have been provided and there is a sharper focus on extending pupils' mathematical thinking. Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are now expected to write down their mathematical explanations routinely. They increasingly justify their answers and identify exceptions to patterns successfully. The progress of all pupils is reviewed closely, and those who are at risk of falling behind are given extra support. Accordingly, the majority of pupils make strong progress in mathematics. However, as we discussed, there are occasionally missed opportunities for learning, and too few pupils are attaining the higher standards in mathematics.

- Leaders monitor pupils who have low rates of attendance rigorously. Together, they work closely with families and with external agencies, as necessary. A range of help is provided for pupils, including counselling for emotional issues and learning tasks to be completed at home. Staff also provide equipment to support home learning, and pupils can attend before-school and after-school clubs. This support is appreciated by parents. Senior leaders consider requests for leave of absence from school very carefully. Staff monitor the few remaining pupils with low levels of attendance closely, and effective action is being taken. Pupils enjoy coming to school and know that it is important to attend regularly. As a result, pupils' overall attendance and the levels of persistent absence are now better than the national averages.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- most-able pupils are challenged consistently to attain the higher standards in reading and mathematics
- the academy board continues to refine its skills for holding senior leaders to account to raise standards further.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the academy board, the chair of the board of trustees for The Dover Federation for the Arts Multi-Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Rosemary Addison
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders, the chair and three other members of the academy board, the chair of the MAT and the chair of the members. I also met with a group of pupils from Years 3 to 6 and heard a group of high-attaining pupils read. You or other senior leaders accompanied me on visits to classrooms, where I observed learning, spoke to pupils and looked at their work. A range of pupils' mathematics books were reviewed with senior leaders. I observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms and around the school. I took account of 30 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 14 free-text comments. A range of documentation was scrutinised, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, information on the school's website, safety records, minutes of meetings, various policies and information about pupils' progress.