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Dear Mr Horne

Short inspection of Friern Barnet School

Following my visit to the school on 18 April 2018 with Luisa Bonelli, Ofsted Inspector, 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 February 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Pupils' achievement in their GCSE examinations declined last year and was below average. Pupils' progress in mathematics, science and the humanities subjects was not good enough. The most able pupils did not fulfil their potential, unlike in the previous year. While lower-attaining pupils made broadly average progress, progress was poor for pupils eligible for special educational needs (SEN) support and for disadvantaged pupils. Progress in modern foreign languages was strong, as in previous years, and progress in English was broadly average. Leaders can point to a small but significant minority of pupils who achieved poorly for reasons beyond the school's control. Nevertheless, the rest of the cohort still underachieved. Actions taken to improve the quality of teaching, particularly this year, are making a difference. More pupils are on track to reach their academic targets than at this time last year, including in the subjects that underperformed.

At the last inspection, leaders were asked to improve the quality of teaching. Progress in this area has not been rapid enough. This is partly a result of the school's difficulties in recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers. It is also due to the school's strategies to strengthen teaching not being effective enough. This year, the actions taken to improve teaching are making more of a difference than before. Checks on the quality of teaching are more focused and are used to inform staff training. They lead to effective additional support for those teachers whose practice falls below leaders' expectations. The school's

governors are well informed about the quality of teaching because they receive much more precise information about the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement than before.

In the lessons observed during the inspection, pupils were, for the most part, engaged and learning well. This includes in the subjects where achievement was poor last year. Where teaching is most effective, pupils' books show that work is regularly completed, assessed in line with the school's assessment policy, and consequently improved upon. This practice is not consistent though. The inspectors' scrutiny of pupils' work showed that in a few lessons, teachers had not followed up on pupils' missing or unfinished work or ensured that work of poor quality was improved. Not all staff adhere to leaders' expectations about how assessment should be used to help pupils improve their work.

Leaders now track the achievement of different groups more carefully, including disadvantaged pupils. Leaders can point to evidence that the achievement of this group of pupils is improving. They ensure that the additional funding provided to support these pupils is allocated appropriately. They do not, however, check that spending is informed by close analysis of pupils' barriers to learning or by evaluations of how much difference previous spending has made. Leaders' reporting of the school's use of the pupil premium funding on the school's website does not meet the requirements set by the Department for Education.

In the lessons observed, pupils generally behaved well. In discussions, they reported that behaviour has improved. The pupils said that the revised behaviour policy is working more effectively than the previous policy. Not all pupils think behaviour is good enough, however. Of the 135 pupils who completed the Ofsted online pupil survey, 43% reported that behaviour is good only 'some of the time'. Strategies to reduce fixed-term exclusions are working. This is a result of the improved behaviour policy as well as improvements to the school's arrangements for supporting pupils exhibiting challenging behaviour. Pupils from White British backgrounds continue to be excluded more than other groups of pupils, however.

Attendance overall has improved, having previously been below average, including for disadvantaged pupils. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has reduced markedly. Pupils enjoy the way that good attendance is rewarded and know that the school now takes concerted action where pupils' attendance falls below expectations. The attendance of White British pupils remains too low, however. Most, but not all, pupils arrive to school on time.

The written comments submitted to Ofsted by parents and carers varied considerably. While some parents are very positive about the school, others are more critical. Some parents expressed concerns about the decline in the school's academic performance last year.

Governors and the local authority recognise that pupils' achievement was not good enough last year. They know that attendance has been too low and fixed-term exclusions too high. Inspectors found clear signs of improvement. However, it is too

soon to see the full impact of the improvements being made on all groups of pupils by the time they leave the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors ensure that all the required checks on staff are carried out and recorded carefully. Staff receive regular and up-to-date training in child protection. They are well informed about the signs to look out for if they have concerns that a pupil is at risk of harm. The pupils who spoke to inspectors all reported that they feel safe in school. They have received teaching, including from the police, about gang-related violence and knife crime. Pupils know how to protect themselves from other potential risks.

All of the pupils who spoke with inspectors said that they would feel comfortable approaching a member of staff if they had any worries. They also know that the school's counselling service is available should they need further help. The pupils told inspectors that any incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively and that pupils of all backgrounds get along well. This helps them to feel safe. Children who are looked after by the local authority receive good-quality support from their designated teacher. Good systems are in place to ensure that the pupils who receive part of their education elsewhere are safe. Leaders and governors are well aware that Ofsted identified weaknesses in the local authority's children's services last year. They are tenacious and effective in ensuring that vulnerable pupils receive the support they need.

Inspection findings

- Leaders know that attendance has not been good enough for White British pupils and disadvantaged pupils. Too many of these pupils have been persistently absent. Improved strategies to raise attendance have seen an increase in the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. Fewer disadvantaged pupils are now persistently absent from school. There remains, however, a small cohort of White British pupils who do not attend regularly enough.
- Teachers' greater awareness of the disadvantaged pupils in their classes is ensuring that these pupils receive better support than before. Leaders ensure that disadvantaged pupils who are preparing for their public examinations receive good additional support, including through additional teaching provided after school and at weekends. Better teaching, together with more rigorous monitoring of the achievement of different groups of pupils, are ensuring that White British pupils are achieving better than in the past. The school's allocation of additional funding to support these pupils is not used strategically enough, however.
- Since the last inspection, pupils in receipt of SEN support have not achieved well enough. Too many have been temporarily excluded from school. Leaders recognise that not all teaching has met the needs of this group of pupils. This year, they have made improvements to the way in which teaching assistants are deployed. Their work is more carefully managed than before. Nevertheless, leaders with responsibility for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities do not routinely hold teachers to account for the impact of teaching on this group of pupils. Hence, while fixed-term exclusions for

this group of pupils are much reduced, these pupils continue to achieve less well than other pupils in the school.

- Teaching in mathematics, science and the humanities subjects is improving. Leaders have made some good appointments. Staffing in these subjects is more stable than before. The pupils who spoke with inspectors, including the most able pupils, all described the improvements they had noticed to the quality of teaching in these subjects this year. The most able pupils were particularly complimentary about the quality of teaching they are receiving in mathematics. Good leadership in mathematics ensures that pupils receive regular opportunities to develop their problem-solving skills and mathematical fluency. Revised setting arrangements have raised aspirations in mathematics for pupils of all abilities. In science, teachers' greater focus on developing pupils' technical vocabulary and their writing skills means that they are better equipped to deal with the new, more challenging GCSEs. Nevertheless, leaders know that gaps remain in some pupils' knowledge and understanding because of the poor teaching they have received in the past.
- In the lessons visited, relationships between pupils and their teachers were good. However, teachers did not always make the most of these good relationships to ensure that pupils worked as productively as they could. Sometimes, they allowed pupils to chat as they work. This slowed the pace of learning.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the better quality of teaching seen this year results in clear and sustained improvements to pupils' achievements, including disadvantaged pupils, pupils from White British backgrounds and the most able pupils
- all teachers have the highest expectations of how much pupils can achieve in lessons, tackle low-level chatter effectively and adhere to the school's assessment policy
- the support provided for disadvantaged pupils is informed by more careful analysis of pupils' barriers to learning and rigorous evaluation of the impact of spending decisions
- the school's pupil premium strategy meets requirements and the planned external review of the pupil premium is completed before the end of term
- leaders responsible for the achievement of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make regular checks on the quality of teaching to ensure that it meets pupils' needs well
- the improvements seen in pupils' behaviour are fully embedded so that all pupils experience behaviour that is consistently good
- they maintain a relentless focus on improving the attendance of White British pupils and disadvantaged pupils
- pupils' punctuality to school improves, particularly in key stage 4.

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

Yours sincerely

Daniel Burton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors observed teaching and looked at pupils' work in English, mathematics, science, business studies, history, geography, religious studies and computing. A member of the school's senior leadership team joined inspectors on all visits to lessons. Inspectors spoke with pupils in lessons and in formal meetings and considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys from 135 pupils and 52 members of staff. They also considered the views of parents who used the Ofsted free-text service. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including records about pupils' attendance and behaviour, the arrangements for safeguarding pupils and information about pupils' achievement. They held meetings with senior and middle leaders, members of the governing body and a senior representative of the local authority. Inspectors spoke by telephone with staff from other settings where a small minority of pupils receive some of their education.