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Miss Valmai Roberts
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Dear Miss Roberts

Short inspection of Park Brow Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 11 February 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 Park Brow was judged to be good in October 2010.

Since the previous inspection, pupils from the two school sites have come together in a new school building. There have been some changes in teaching staff over the years. Two new deputy headteachers took up post in September 2015. The early years has been extended to include provision for two-year-old children.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection.

You know your school exceptionally well. No stone is left unturned in your quest to improve pupils' experience at Park Brow and enhance their chances of success in later life. You look beyond the school gates and the local authority boundaries to seek out new ideas to lift pupils' achievement. New ways of working hold no fear for you and your staff. Everyone is happy to follow your innovative lead because you make sure staff have the right skills to take change on board. They do so willingly, with confidence and enthusiasm. Staff trust your decisions and they share your ambitious goals for the future.

When inspectors visited your school in 2010, they identified a number of strengths. Despite the challenges you have faced in bringing two schools together onto one site, these positive features have not fallen by the wayside. Children enter school happily because they enjoy everything that is on offer. They take their learning seriously and behave well, showing respect to their classmates and the adults who care for them.

Park Brow offers a multitude of rich learning opportunities within and outside of the classroom. Corridors are jam-packed with pupils' work across different subjects. Aspirations are rising due to frequent visits from adults, often parents, to widen pupils' views of different career options. An extensive range of extra-curricular activities is on offer to meet the interests of different groups. Opportunities to be involved in community events or to raise money for charity are rarely missed. Everyone is willing to go the extra mile to help all pupils thrive academically, socially and emotionally. As a result, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. They are well prepared to become valuable citizens in modern Britain.

You, the staff and the governing body were asked to improve teaching and pupils' attendance by inspectors in 2010. You have forged ahead in both of these areas.

Absence levels have halved, and far fewer pupils miss large amounts of time from school. In particular, pupils with special educational needs or disability are in class far more regularly than in the past. Current attendance information shows that absence rates have dropped again this year. The attendance of all groups is nudging closer to the national average.

Teaching is getting stronger over time due to your high expectations. The systematic, whole-school approaches to teaching mean that pupils have a smooth journey as they move from class to class. Following a trial period in Year 1 last year, you have rolled out the 'three teach – pre-teach' initiative across all year groups. Small-group work, seamlessly led by teachers and skilled teaching assistants, is paying dividends. Teaching sessions are meeting pupils' needs well. Adults are tackling gaps in pupils' learning effectively and removing any barriers that hinder progress.

Most of the parents I chatted to, and those who shared their views on Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents), are positive about all aspects of school life.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of good quality.

Keeping pupils safe is a top priority at Park Brow. You have invested heavily in honing the skills of an expert team who keep safeguarding at the forefront of everyone's work. Government guidance is followed closely. You ensure that staff receive up-to-date training. They are well equipped to spot, and report, any signs that may indicate pupils are at risk of harm. Concerns are followed up decisively and rigorously until you and your staff are satisfied that pupils are safe. You exploit the strong partnership with other agencies, including social services, to help support pupils and their families. Your checks on staff, volunteers and other visitors to the school meet all the statutory requirements.

The pupils I chatted to during the day told me they feel safe at school. They say behaviour is typically good and pupils get along with each other. They point to occasional incidents of bullying and some name-calling from time to time. However, they are confident that any adult will listen to their worries and resolve their concerns. Helping

pupils to keep themselves safe is woven through the curriculum and complemented by a range of visitors to the school. Pupils have a good awareness of how to minimise the risks associated with using the internet and mobile phones. Older pupils find out about healthy relationships and know where to seek help if they feel unsafe around adults.

Inspection findings

- Your understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development is flawless and honest. You are constantly checking the work of the school and measuring how it compares with the best across the country. Excuses are not permitted and criticism is viewed as a positive tool to drive improvement.
- Your evaluation of teaching is very accurate because you check what you see in classes alongside pupils' books. This gives you a sense of the teaching pupils experience each day. Good practice in classrooms is celebrated and shared. Teachers benefit from a range of training opportunities to refresh and refine their teaching skills.
- Responsibility for driving improvement is divided evenly across the school. Other leaders reflect your passion and steely determination to provide the best for the pupils at Park Brow. Leaders provide quality guidance and training to staff. They constantly check the difference their work is making to teaching and pupils' achievement.
- The governing body is a powerful ally in your drive for excellence. Governors know how different groups of pupils are faring because they have a good grasp of data. They visit school frequently and spend time talking to staff and pupils. They ensure that financial resources are targeted to where they are needed most. Governors are proud of, and ambitious for, the school. They are as keen to improve as everyone else. Some members are giving their time generously, attending an extensive training programme in order to strengthen governance further.
- Your relentless focus on 'getting it right from the start' means that the time and energy you have ploughed into the early years are bearing rich fruit. The time children spend in Nursery and Reception sets them up very well for their future. The number of children gaining a good level of development by the end of Reception is rising each year. More children are ready for the challenges in Year 1 than has been the case in the past. This is leading to higher standards at the end of Year 2, particularly in reading and writing.
- Pupils are gaining success in reading because they have a secure grasp of phonics (the sounds that letters make). The number of pupils gaining the Year 1 phonics check matches the national average.
- Standards by the end of Year 6 do not mirror this positive picture lower down in the school. They have declined since the last inspection. However, this is not due to weaknesses in pupils' progress. In fact, until 2015, pupils' progress across Key Stage 2 was as good as other pupils across the country. Pupils' lower than average starting points in the past, plus the impact of school merger, explain these lower standards.

- Year 6 pupils made the progress they should in reading, writing and mathematics in 2015. However, fewer pupils made greater gains in their learning compared to the national average. This is not typical. Almost one third of this class joined Park Brow during or after Year 4. Nearly all of this group were working well below the levels expected for their age. Although these pupils made progress, they had too much ground to cover by the end of Year 6. Those pupils who started in Year 3 made the same strong progress as other pupils in previous years.
- Disadvantaged pupils typically make secure gains in their learning. However, the standards they reach are lower than their classmates and other pupils in the country. Your information shows that these gaps are closing quickly for current pupils.
- There are marked improvements in the teaching of mathematics. Younger pupils are gaining a firm foundation in understanding number patterns and calculations. Older pupils are deepening their learning as they use their mathematical skills to solve a range of problems. Your heightened expectations mean that staff have set their sights higher. Teachers are demanding more from pupils, although some teachers are racing ahead too quickly. This means that pupils' mistakes are allowed to go unchecked and some pupils face work that is too difficult.
- There are a number of projects in place to capture pupils' desire to read. A new library and the challenge to read in unusual places are all putting reading in the limelight. Nevertheless, there are too few opportunities to promote different types of books in classrooms. This accounts for pupils' narrow knowledge of children's authors.
- The warm relationships teachers forge with pupils underpin their desire to work hard. Good use of humour, a relentless celebration of pupils' success and a gentle manner sum up the teachers at Park Brow nicely. Teachers want the best for the pupils in their care. Nevertheless, they are not always helping pupils to develop suitable handwriting skills or to present their work to the highest standard.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they raise standards further by the end of Key Stage 2 by:
 - ensuring teachers tackle weaknesses in pupils' handwriting and presentation skills
 - helping teachers to make sure pupils' mathematical understanding is secure before they move on to the next stage of their learning
 - encouraging pupils to read more widely by raising the profile of different authors and types of reading material within classrooms.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, four senior leaders, two members of the Inclusion Team and four governors. I held discussions with a representative from the local authority and a group of older boys and girls. I also spoke to a number of pupils of different ages during playtime. We visited every classroom to talk to pupils, observe them at work and look at their books. I chatted to a small number of parents at the start of the school day. I took account of the 17 responses on Parent View, including the 16 free-text responses. I considered the 23 responses from the staff online questionnaire.

I considered a range of school information including your checks on teaching, your self-evaluation and your current action plan. We discussed your assessments of pupils' progress across the school. I evaluated safeguarding procedures, including your policies to keep children safe and staff training. I reviewed the safeguarding checks on adults who work and visit the school and the records you keep of any concerns raised about pupils' safety.