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Nicholas Cornell
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Cornell

Short inspection of Brookside School

Following my visit to the school on 3 March 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 the school was judged to be good in November 2010.

This school continues to be good.

You have maintained the good standard of education reported at the last inspection. The school is a friendly, caring and supportive place. Pupils enjoy learning, work hard and make good progress. Pupils typically behave well in lessons and have positive relationships with staff. They feel safe and understand the importance of treating everyone equally and not tolerating prejudice or discrimination.

When the school was last inspected, the inspector found that pupils made good progress and achieved well in a caring environment where equality and diversity were valued. The inspector praised your clear leadership. He also identified some areas for specific attention. One was to secure consistently good teaching across the school to provide a suitable level of challenge for all pupils and the most able in particular. The other was to improve the quality of outdoor learning in the Early Years and Key Stage 1. You have effectively addressed these points. Pupils now routinely benefit from good and better teaching across the school. As a result pupils, including the most able, typically make good progress from their starting points in English and mathematics. Leaders have improved the outdoor spaces for Early Years and Year 1, introducing new equipment and such things as gardening and reading areas. Good use of these spaces has contributed well to notably improved outcomes in Early Years and increasingly strong achievement at Key Stage 1.

You have taken effective action to address other areas that needed attention. Leaders are working well to improve attendance. The proportion of pupils with poor attendance has dropped this school year, reversing a previous increase.

You have adapted well to the removal of national curriculum levels. Your new assessment system enables leaders and teachers to understand how well pupils are achieving in English and mathematics and where further teaching is needed to ensure that pupils meet the standard expected for their age. A suitable approach is now being developed for science. Leaders have made sure that plans for teaching foundation subjects cover the required content. However, leaders have not defined the level of skill and depth of knowledge pupils are expected to achieve by the end of each topic. They have also not checked whether plans for how each subject is taught enable pupils to build their subject skills and knowledge progressively from topic to topic and year to year.

Leaders' priorities for further development of the school are sound and the actions being taken to address these priorities are well considered. However, leaders do not routinely define the impact their actions should have by key points in time. Consequently, governors are not well placed to hold leaders tightly to account for the success of their actions.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have made sure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. All necessary checks on the identity and suitability of staff are carried out and recorded appropriately. Staff receive regular training that ensures that they are abreast with government requirements. They know who to refer to if they have any safeguarding concerns.

Pupils feel safe in the school and know how to keep themselves safe when using social media. Incidents of name calling and bullying are rare and dealt with effectively.

Inspection findings

- Governors have a sound understanding of the school's performance. They challenge leaders about areas of relative weakness and make sure actions are in place to address these.
- Leaders' self-evaluation is accurate and action plans focus on suitable priorities. However, leaders do not routinely define the improvements they expect to see by key points in the year. As a result, when reviewing progress, they and governors are not clear if leaders' actions have been as successful as they should have been.
- Leaders have made sure the school's curriculum covers the content for each subject defined by the 2014 national curriculum. However, leaders have not considered whether each topic in science and foundation subjects builds on the previous topics well enough for pupils to make strong progress over time.
- Leaders have developed a suitable approach to assessing and tracking pupils' achievement in mathematics and English in line with the new national curriculum. Sensible plans are also in place for assessing science. Leaders are well placed to develop this approach further to encompass foundation subjects.

- Provision in the Early Years has improved. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of Reception has doubled since 2013 so that in 2015 it was a little below the national figure. School information shows a notably higher proportion is on track to reach this level in 2016.
- Over time pupils' achievement in writing and mathematics by the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 has been in line with that seen nationally and achievement in reading has been high. Pupils currently in the school make good progress and are on track to achieve well.
- Leaders have made good use of pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils. These pupils make good progress and the gaps in achievement between them and others are small. Leaders have recently extended the use of this funding to support disadvantaged children in Reception. This is helping these children make good progress and catch up from low starting points.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. Pupils pay attention and apply themselves well. Disruption to learning is uncommon.
- Pupils' attendance has remained broadly static over three years and in 2015 fell below the national level. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils with high levels of absence increased during that time. Leaders' increased focus on challenging poor attendance and encouraging and supporting pupils to attend well is starting to have an impact. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils with poor attendance has dropped notably this school year and overall attendance has improved.
- Parents speak highly of the school. They commend the friendly, dedicated and supportive staff.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the way foundation subjects are taught consistently enables pupils to build their skills and knowledge as they progress through each key stage
- the assessment system evolves to encompass all subjects so that leaders can check pupils' achievement across the curriculum
- they are clear about the precise impact the actions leaders take to improve the school should have by key points in time so that leaders can be held tightly to account.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Oxfordshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Diana Choulerton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, other leaders, teachers, the Chair of the Governing Body and four other governors. We visited parts of five lessons. We also scrutinised a selection of pupils' writing and mathematics work and looked at some Reception learning journals. I took account of 16 pupil survey responses, 16 staff survey responses and 32 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. In addition, I considered 13 parent responses by free text. I also spoke with some parents at the start of the school day and with groups of pupils at lunchtime. I analysed a range of the school's documentation, including leaders' checks on pupils' progress, the school's improvement plan, curriculum planning and safeguarding policies and procedures. We discussed your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness.