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Mrs Jane Headland
Headteacher
Brookfields Special School
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Dear Mrs Headland

Short inspection of Brookfields Special School

Following my visit to the school on 9 March 2016 with Ross Macdonald, 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 your school was judged to be outstanding in September 2010.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

'Uplifting', 'enriching', 'creative' and 'innovative' are just some of the words used by staff to describe what it is like to be part of your school. Parents agree. The inspection team received many comments endorsing the strong relationships built up within the school and the way that staff and leaders are prepared to 'go the extra mile' to improve outcomes for pupils. As one parent said, the 'future is bright' for their child because they attend Brookfields.

You rightly say that the school 'never stands still'. Members of the school leadership team are highly reflective and thoughtful. Each aspect of the school's work is carefully reviewed and evaluated. You always consider what you could do even better next time.

You and your staff uphold a long-term and ambitious view of what each pupil's journey through the school should be. Your over-arching priority is to ensure that pupils leave the school as well prepared as possible to take their place in society, to live a fulfilled life and to gain meaningful employment, if appropriate. To make this possible, you insist that staff are equipped with all the skills and expertise to be the best that they can be.

Following the last inspection, you systematically set about tackling the key areas for improvement. Over the last three years in particular, there has been rapid improvement in all aspects of the school's work. The leadership structure has been remodelled, three assistant headteachers have been appointed to lead alongside the deputy headteachers and teaching has gone from strength to strength. Lines of accountability are crystal clear and your management of staff performance has been sharpened up. All these improvements have been to the true benefit of pupils because leaders know exactly what they should be aiming for as a school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Staff are highly alert to any change in pupils or any risk to their safety and know exactly what to do if they have a concern. The watchwords are 'never go home with a shred of doubt', so staff are confident that they can pass on concerns about pupils and that these will be acted on promptly. All training for staff and the designated leaders for child protection is up to date and takes into account recent guidance on the risks of extremism and radicalisation. Leaders can identify instances where, because swift action was taken, pupils were protected.

Checks on staff working with pupils have all been carried out thoroughly. Comprehensive records related to safeguarding concerns and involvement with local authority children's services are kept up to date and show clearly how meticulous staff have been in monitoring pupils' welfare and sharing information appropriately.

School leaders recently identified that they wished to improve an already good system in order to make it even more efficient. To that end, they have created a secure database which provides a clear overview of all safeguarding concerns, enabling quick access to up-to-date records when needed.

Pupils are kept safe while in school. Pupils know who they should speak to in school if they have any concerns. They told an inspector: 'Staff know us well and help us when we are down or upset. They know when we are unhappy.'

Inspection findings

- School leaders are rightly focused on developing the best curriculum for the pupils and have recently carried out a review of the subjects and programmes on offer. Leaders are ambitious and want pupils' learning in school to 'open doors' to them when they leave. Pupils benefit from specialist teaching in subjects including art, drama, music, English and science. Careful planning of lesson topics around common themes helps pupils to make sensible links between their different subjects. As a result, they produce superb work that compares well with that from any other school. Stunning art work is displayed everywhere around the site and is testament to what all pupils can achieve.
- School leaders have an excellent overview of teaching and learning in all areas of the school and they ensure pupils' good progression through the different key stages. Teaching is methodically checked through a

comprehensive programme of observations, scrutinies of pupils' work and analysis of progress information. Outstanding practice is identified and shared across the school so that staff can learn from each other, maintain the highest of expectations and deepen their understanding of pupils' needs.

- The school is outward looking and has forged productive and innovative partnerships with local schools, the teaching schools alliance and also employers. A highly successful outreach programme provides support for more than 50 pupils in mainstream and other special schools; it contributes to the excellent reputation that the school has both locally and regionally.
- An integrated, multi-disciplinary approach to teaching, learning and assessment is typical of the school's creative approach. As one of the therapists told an inspector, 'We are part of a team, not an individual service.' Pupils benefit from a wide range of therapeutic support, helping to overcome barriers and remove ceilings to pupils' achievements.
- Staff ensure that pupils are ready to learn by planning carefully, ensuring that resources are appropriate and that classrooms are well equipped. As school starts, there is a palpable air of anticipation because staff and pupils are looking forward to learning together. On arrival, pupils have a 'wake up, shake up' session to help set the tone for the day and signal the transition from home to school.
- Teachers are highly skilled in tailoring work to different abilities in their class. In this way, pupils work on common topics and are together as a group, but also stretched and challenged as individuals.
- Pupils clearly understand the aims of lessons and what is expected of them. Tasks are explained extremely well; teachers and assistants expertly demonstrate techniques, question pupils closely and coach them through activities without doing the work for them.
- School leaders have quite rightly invested in the work of teaching assistants. They receive high-quality training, set challenging targets and are valued by teachers, pupils and parents because of their expertise and support.
- Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their own work and evaluate how much they have learned. Pupils concentrate well, are tenacious and know that they need to learn and practise different skills. They told an inspector, 'Lessons can be hard but we get there in the end.'
- Teachers and assistants precisely record and track pupils' achievements throughout the day and at key assessment points. For those pupils who are able to respond, teachers' feedback is useful and helps them to make more progress. Teachers and assistants also annotate pupils' work and make photographic records of their progress, which vividly show what pupils have achieved.
- Warm and respectful relationships between staff and pupils create a purposeful and productive atmosphere. Behaviour is exemplary in and out of lessons. The school aims not exclude pupils but instead goes out of its way to provide the right kind of support, even for those pupils who present the most challenging behaviour because of complex difficulties.
- The school has recently set up a Nurture Group to provide intensive support for pupils who are struggling to settle to learning. The impact of this group has been extremely heartening; pupils' emotional well-being is improving and many are already able to join their classmates in regular lessons.

- Pupils greatly enjoy breaktimes and lunchtimes together in clubs and when playing games. Supervision levels are high but the pupils are able to have the social freedoms that would be seen in any mainstream school. In this way, pupils are practising independence and safety when out and about, but in a secure and familiar environment.
- Pupils' progress in personal development and social skills is remarkable. They have a wealth of opportunities to learn about different cultures, tolerance, rights, responsibilities and differences between people. Pupils have a voice in the life of the school, not only through spectacular school productions and sporting fixtures but also through significant contributions to leadership decisions.
- Outcomes for pupils of all abilities are outstanding. For example, the most-able pupils are able to attain results in English and art that compare well with those of pupils with similar starting points in mainstream schools. Pupils with complex or profound difficulties also make excellent progress, especially in their social development, and are prepared exceptionally well for their next steps.
- School leaders have an impressive grasp of how well pupils are doing. Information about personal and social development, emotional well-being and behaviour is analysed alongside academic progress information to shape a complete picture of each pupil's achievement. From this information, ambitious targets are set which challenge pupils and raise their aspirations.
- The school is wisely developing ways of improving pupils' reading. While many pupils are confident with their knowledge of phonics (sounds that letters make), some pupils find it difficult to apply their knowledge in day-to-day lessons and when out in the community reading signs and symbols.
- Numbers of pupils staying on into the post-16 provision have increased since the last inspection and curriculum pathways have been developed to meet older learners' needs. Successful work experience programmes, including an internship at a local primary school and a partnership with Royal Berkshire Hospital, have created new opportunities for learners to gain actual employment.
- Pupils throughout the school have great opportunities to develop their enterprise and business acumen through selling articles they have made. For example, pupils have made attractive wooden trays out of donated wine crates which are sold at local garden centres.
- The school is rightly proud that, since the last inspection, all learners have left the school and gone on to education, employment or training. School leaders can also show that previous learners at the school have sustained their success and continue to be in education or work.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' reading at all levels improves further through consistent reinforcement and development in day-to-day lessons.

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

Yours sincerely

Janet Pearce
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with senior leaders, a group of teaching staff, therapists and the school improvement advisor. An inspector met formally with a group of pupils and we also spoke to pupils informally in and out of lessons. I spoke to the Vice-Chair of the Governing Body on the telephone and the Chair of the Governing Body attended the final feedback meeting at the end of the inspection. Inspectors made visits to 15 different lessons, accompanied by senior leaders, to observe teaching and learning and look at pupils' work. A sample of pupils' work was scrutinised, together with examples of assessments. A range of documentation was considered, including records related to safeguarding and vetting checks on staff working in the school. Records relating to pupils' progress were also reviewed. Inspectors took into account 21 responses to the pupil survey and the 121 responses to the staff survey, which included 27 comments. There were 49 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, of which 40 included comments that were taken into account during the inspection.