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Mrs Hannah Rimmer
Headteacher
Bernards Heath Infant School
154 Sandridge Road
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Dear Mrs Rimmer

Short inspection of Bernards Heath Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 11 October 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 October 2011.

This school continues to be good.

Along with other school leaders, you have maintained the good quality of education at the school since the last inspection. There have been many changes at the school over the past two years. A completely new leadership team is now in place and there have been several changes to the teaching staff. Despite the challenges that such changes bring, your new leadership team has secured the trust of both staff and parents. You have ensured that new teachers have received appropriate support. As a result they have settled well into their roles and have made a valuable contribution to the school's development. Parents are extremely supportive of the school and your leadership. Over 200 parents responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and almost every single response was positive. Parents rightly believe that the school is well led and managed and that their children are well taught. As one parent wrote, 'Bernards Heath Infant and Nursery School is a great school, exceptionally well led at all levels by motivated and dedicated staff. The school is excellent at providing structure and material to help parents support their children.'

At the previous inspection the headteacher was asked to:

- ensure that the quality of teaching is typically good or better
- improve the quality of assessment and feedback provided for pupils
- improve pupils' cultural awareness and development.

Good progress has been made against each of these areas, and the improvements are reflected in the quality of work seen in books and the high standards being achieved by the end of Year 2. The school has developed a curriculum which helps children to develop a good understanding of the wider world and the different cultures and religions which exist within it. Events such as the annual Global Families Day celebrate the cultural diversity within the school population. Parents are invited into school to showcase items, such as food and clothing, which reflect their ethnic heritage. The school has also developed links with a school in South Africa and was recently visited by the school's choir, which shared aspects of their culture through dance and song.

Safeguarding is effective.

Along with other school leaders you have established effective safeguarding procedures. Staff receive appropriate training, and policies are fully compliant with current requirements. Comprehensive checks are made on staff before they start working at the school, and the school's single central record of these checks is well maintained, accurate and up to date. Any concerns that adults have about pupils are recorded and carefully followed up. Where necessary the school works effectively with external agencies and ensures that the agreed child protection procedures are followed. Staff regularly receive training and information on safeguarding matters. Pupils say that they feel safe, and all of the parents who responded to Parent View stated that their children are safe while at school.

Inspection findings

- There is a strong sense of community at Bernards Heath Infant School. School leaders ensure that parents are viewed as fellow educators. They provide regular information and advice to parents about how to support learning. On the day of this inspection three large groups of parents were in school, to either observe an assembly or attend one of two meetings being held on how to support children's early reading development. Parents value this support, and the positive relationship between home and school, highly. One parent wrote, 'Staff manage to convey their considerable enthusiasm to parents and share on a regular basis insights from their training. They enable us parents to apply these methods and knowledge to help our children in their development.'
- The strong relationship between home and school results in a smooth transition for children into the Nursery or Reception class. Parents are offered opportunities to visit the school and provide information about their child's interests and abilities prior to them starting in the Reception or Nursery class. Staff also visit the many pre-school settings which children attend before starting at Bernards Heath. These arrangements help staff to quickly get to know the children, their skills and abilities and what they need to do to develop their learning.
- Children make good progress in the early years. They have access to a wide range of resources in a well-organised learning environment. Good use is made of the outdoor areas, where activities such as water play don't merely replicate but extend those provided inside. During this inspection, children were seen

being challenged to move large quantities of water using pipes and hoses. They engaged enthusiastically with the activity, collaborating well and showing good perseverance.

- Very good use is made of outdoor learning across the school. Several areas in the school grounds have been cultivated and used to grow a variety of plants and vegetables. Parents recently helped to transform an underused part of the school field into a wild garden, providing a resource which teachers use regularly to teach about plants and insects and other aspects of the natural world.
- School leaders have recognised that improvements need to be made to the teaching of phonics. Results of the phonics check, at the end of Year 1, were below the national average in 2016. Changes have been made to the way in which this aspect of reading is taught and additional support is provided for those pupils who failed to reach the expected standard. However, other aspects of reading are taught well and standards at the end of key stage 1 improved in 2016 and were above the national average.
- The teaching of mathematics is effective and pupils achieve well. Attainment at the end of key stage 1 was above the national average in 2016. There is currently a focus on providing more opportunities for pupils to investigate and solve problems in mathematics lessons, with the aim of further improving standards.
- In 2016, the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils improved, particularly in reading and mathematics. However, school leaders recognise the need to ensure that this group of pupils makes more rapid progress across the school if the gap in attainment between them and other pupils nationally is to diminish.
- Almost every parent stated that they receive valuable information about the school's curriculum and their child's progress. Teachers are in regular contact with parents and provide high-quality information about pupils' progress and attainment, and how parents can support their children at home. One parent said, 'The school is excellent at providing structure and material to help parents support their children. We have attended many evenings at school covering topics including early years maths, reading and phonics. Each and every time, we have felt very well supported by the school and have, in turn, felt more capable of supporting our sons.'
- By the end of key stage 1 pupils attain well in writing. In 2016 attainment was above the national average. However, the work seen in many of the pupils' books during this inspection contained too many spelling errors. Too often these errors went unchecked and, as a consequence, were repeated. This limited the progress that many pupils made and prevented them from making even better progress with their writing.
- The school's work to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is good. Careful checks are made on the progress that they make and good support is provided by teachers and other adults, who are well trained in meeting both pastoral and learning needs. These pupils make good progress from their various starting points.
- Governance is effective. Governors bring a wide range of professional experience to their role. Governors help to ensure that all statutory requirements are met, including those relating to safeguarding. They have a

good understanding of the school through the high-quality reports they receive from the headteacher and also from the direct experience they have in school. A recent re-organisation has resulted in fewer committees and more sharply focused meetings. This has helped governors to spend time on the most important aspects of their work and hold the headteacher to account more effectively.

- The school values the support that has been provided by the local authority. An adviser visits regularly, to support leaders in reviewing the effectiveness of the school and its plans for improvement. School staff also rate highly the support they receive through training events and local subject leader networks.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- spelling is taught more effectively so that most pupils are able to spell words at the level specified by the national curriculum for their age group
- all teachers have high aspirations about what pupils can achieve in subjects across the curriculum
- the achievement of disadvantaged pupils continues to improve.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Tomkow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you, your senior leaders and three governors, including the chair of the governing body, and I spoke to a representative from the local authority. I made short visits to all classrooms to observe teaching and learning and looked at work in pupils' books. I spent time speaking with pupils and observed them at play and during lunchtime. I reviewed school documents regarding safeguarding, including the record of checks on the suitability of each member of staff to work with young people. I also looked at pupils' attendance, and school self-evaluation and improvement plans. I also considered responses from parents and staff to Ofsted questionnaires, including free text responses.

My key lines of enquiry were checking how well the schools keeps pupils safe, the teaching of phonics, how well disadvantaged pupils achieve, how well pupils are taught to read, how well pupils are taught to be aware of different cultures and how well the school's curriculum covers a range of subjects beyond English and mathematics.