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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Ian Southern and Mrs Georgina Ryding
Executive Headteachers
Brownlow Fold Primary School
Darley Street
Bolton
Lancashire
BL1 3DX

Dear Mr Southern and Mrs Ryding

Short inspection of Brownlow Fold Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 3 November 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 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your appointment as executive headteachers has significantly enhanced the capacity of leadership in the school and brought about rapid improvements that build upon the work of the predecessor headteacher. You have ensured that good transition arrangements are in place to sustain the capacity of leadership and management when the new headteacher takes up her post in January 2017.

The leaders of English and the early years have an accurate and detailed understanding of the areas they lead. They have a clear vision and passionate commitment to ensuring that pupils get the best education possible. Their actions are appropriate and have a positive impact. Consequently, the achievement of boys in the early years improved rapidly and the progress made by disadvantaged pupils in reading in key stage 2 is now improving quickly.

Improvements have been made regarding the areas identified for development at the previous inspection. Appropriate training has developed teachers' skills, while sharper scrutiny by leaders means that teachers are now held more closely to account. Pupils receive well-matched challenges that develop good attitudes to learning and result in better achievement, particularly in mathematics and writing. Pupils are attentive and eager learners who demonstrate good conduct and manners.

Staff and governors share your pride in the school. Parents who completed the online questionnaire have overwhelming praise for the level of care provided by the school and the impact it has on their children's learning.

You were rightly concerned at the lack of progress in reading made by some pupils in key stage 2 who took the national assessments in summer 2016. Your detailed analysis of what happened in the tests has resulted in well-targeted actions to swiftly address the issues. You have reviewed and improved the use of teaching assistants so that they provide better and more focused support for learning. The appointment of additional teaching staff ensures that pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, receive appropriate extra help with their reading. An after-school club run by senior leaders promotes the love of reading. Additional training has ensured that staff are well equipped with skills to develop pupils' comprehension skills effectively and to provide appropriate challenge for the most able pupils. For example, in one key stage 2 class, pupils confidently explained how they used inference and deduction to answer challenging questions about the meaning of different texts.

The progress that children make in the early years remains good and is improving. Children enter the early years with levels of development much lower than are typical for their age. They make good progress from their differing starting points. Improvements to the classrooms and outdoor space, brought about by the recent full refurbishment of the school's nursery, provide children with access to a high-quality learning environment from an early age. Key workers effectively link curriculum activities closely to boys' interests. This ensures greater levels of engagement and helps to develop boys' confidence to learn. More effectively planned and frequently changed themes in role-play areas provide stimulating opportunities for all children, particularly boys, to develop their confidence and independence through play.

Phonics continues to be a strength in the school due to the quality of teaching that pupils receive. Pupils use their phonic knowledge well to develop their reading skills and are confident to tackle difficult and unfamiliar words.

Your new chair and vice-chair of the governing body have strengthened the rigour with which senior leaders have been held to account. Governors closely monitor the impact of the pupil premium grant. They frequently ask probing questions and receive detailed information about pupils' progress. They have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Governors recognise the need to continually develop and update their skills and knowledge. They are undertaking appropriate training and using links with other local schools' governing bodies effectively to share good practice. The new required format of reporting on the pupil premium grant had been overlooked by your governing body and was missing from the website. However, governors quickly ensured that this was addressed. The school's website now meets requirements.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors ensure that statutory checks are carried out on the suitability of staff to work with children. Staff have up-to-date knowledge of current safeguarding requirements. They are vigilant about the risks posed to pupils, including those of radicalisation and extremism, because of the training they receive. Consequently, the school is a secure and caring environment in which pupils are happy.

Pupils say that they feel safe and that teachers help them. They are confident to talk with staff and willingly engage with visitors. They say that bullying is rare and that if it does occur, staff quickly and effectively deal with it.

Inspection findings

- You and your senior leaders have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and areas for further improvement because of your rigorous monitoring. As a result, your school development plan contains the appropriate priorities for further improvement. Your actions have been swift and well targeted to bring about rapid improvements in the quality of teaching. Consequently, pupils' achievement, particularly in the early years and key stage 1, has shown sustained improvement. You also recognise, because of your candid evaluations, where further action is necessary, particularly in improving pupils' progress in reading in key stage 2.
- Effective links with other local schools ensure that staff share and learn from good practice elsewhere. Subject leaders regularly meet with their colleagues from other schools to develop and evaluate their actions. Appropriate plans are afoot to develop further the links between the governing bodies in three local schools to share good practice.
- Governors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school because of the good-quality information they receive. Governance has been strengthened by the appointment of the new chair and vice-chair of the governing body, along with other new governors who have a range of professional skills. Governors have increased the rigour with which they hold leaders to account. This ensures that they base their evaluations on evidence. As a result, governors have a good understanding of the use and effectiveness of the pupil premium grant.
- The local authority has provided appropriate support and guidance for governors during a period of possible instability in leadership. Consequently, the transition of responsibility to a new substantive headteacher has been well managed and the capacity of the leadership team has grown significantly and is having a good impact on pupils' education.
- Subject leaders share the passionate commitment to improving the outcomes for pupils that is shown by senior leaders and governors. They have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in their subject areas because of their effective monitoring. They welcome the opportunities to lead improvement given to them by the executive headteachers. They also recognise that they are now stringently held to account for the impact of their actions. Consequently, swift and appropriate actions have been implemented which are rapidly improving the progress pupils make, particularly in reading.
- Pupils in all groups, including the least able and the most able disadvantaged, read widely and often. They develop a love of books because reading is promoted well in the school. All classrooms have reading areas that are stimulating and engaging. Different authors are studied across the school so that pupils gain experience of a wide range of genres and types of literature appropriate to their age. Children speak confidently about their favourite authors and can recount their stories.

- Pupils change their books frequently. Good systems are in place to ensure that reading books are well matched to pupils' abilities. Different strategies effectively develop pupils' reading skills and engage reluctant readers, including the good use of reading journals. Consequently, work seen in pupils' books and discussions with pupils show that their comprehension skills are improving quickly. Leaders are aware that some pupils do not develop their abilities to deal with longer reading tasks as well as they should and have put into place appropriate strategies to rectify this.
- The quality of teaching continues to improve. Teachers have a good understanding of the achievement of pupils because of accurate day-to-day assessment and regular rigorous challenge from leaders through pupil progress meetings. Teachers give appropriate guidance to pupils about how to improve their knowledge and skills. They plan sequences of lessons that appropriately challenge pupils, including those who are most-able and/or disadvantaged.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils in all groups, including the disadvantaged and the most able. They use questioning well to probe pupils' understanding and develop their abilities to talk about their learning confidently. As a result, pupils are eager and demonstrate good attitudes to learning. They are happy to explain what they are doing and the reasons for their answers.
- The proportion of Year 1 pupils reaching the expected standard in phonics was above the national average in 2016. Disadvantaged pupils attained better than other pupils nationally in this check. Pupils' success in phonics is the result of high-quality phonics teaching by all staff that ensures that pupils make good progress from their starting points.
- The outcomes for early years children continue to improve over time because of improving teaching and leadership in this area. The majority of children enter the early years with levels of development significantly below those expected for their age. This is particularly the case for boys who show poor levels of independence, which inhibits their learning. A large proportion of children speak English as an additional language and an increasing number of children are international new arrivals with little English language. Children in all groups, particularly those who are disadvantaged, make good progress from their starting points.
- The proportion of children who achieved a good level of development in the early years shows sustained improvement and is now close to the national average. The proportion of disadvantaged children achieving a good level of development has risen rapidly in the last three years and is quickly reducing the difference with the national average for other children. Children are well prepared for key stage 1 and those who are not quite ready receive appropriate support.
- In 2016, pupils achieved well in the statutory assessments at the end of key stage 1 and made good progress from their starting points. Results were in line with national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils did well. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils reaching expected standards was higher than the national averages for other pupils. There were no pupils in the cohort that were identified as most-able.

- The outcomes for pupils in 2016 in the assessment tests at the end of key stage 2 were in line with national averages for writing and mathematics. However, progress in reading, particularly for a small group of middle-ability disadvantaged pupils, was significantly lower than the national average for this group. Pupils of all groups made strong progress in mathematics. Here, the proportion of pupils (including those who are disadvantaged) reaching the expected standard was higher than the national average for other pupils. Achievement in writing was in line with the national average for all groups of pupils. There were very few pupils identified as being most-able in the cohort. The school's records show that the most able pupils across the school generally make good progress from their starting points.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' achievement, particularly in reading in key stage 2, increases
- governors extend their knowledge of good practice in governance through the development of appropriate links with other high-performing governing bodies.

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

Yours sincerely

John Nixon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you as well as other senior leaders, teaching staff and the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. I also met with the local authority adviser who works with the school. I spoke with pupils during lessons and around the school. I took account of the information contained within responses to the online questionnaires for pupils, parents and staff. I visited classrooms to observe pupils' learning and looked at their work in books. I reviewed information about pupils' progress, attainment and attendance. I scrutinised the school's self-evaluation and action plans and looked at safeguarding, including evaluating the impact of the school's procedures and policies to keep children safe, recruitment checks and record-keeping. The areas focused on during the inspection included:

- the effectiveness of the teaching of reading in key stage 2 and the progress pupils make
- the quality of teaching in the early years and the progress children make from their starting points
- the effectiveness of the governing body's monitoring of the impact the pupil premium grant
- the information about the school provided on its website.