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Mrs Debbie Withey
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Dear Mrs Withey

Short inspection of Brookhouse Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 31 January 2017, 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, and has ensured that Brookhouse Primary School continues to improve. The school's motto, 'Be the best you can be,' very well sums up the aspirational culture of the school which is clearly shared by leaders, governors, staff, pupils and parents. Pupils' academic and personal development are treated as equally important, pupils feel safe and happy, enjoy learning and achieve well. Staff say that they are proud to work at the school, and virtually every parent that I spoke to or who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire, Parent View, said that they would recommend the school to other parents.

Throughout the school there is an atmosphere of calm, purposeful endeavour. One parent described the school as having 'a fun and safe learning environment', which very accurately describes a working day at Brookhouse. Relationships between staff and pupils are warm and positive. The pupils themselves are delightful. They are polite and welcoming, and are eager to show off work that they are especially proud of or to talk about the things that they enjoy most in school. In class, pupils are interested and display highly positive attitudes to learning. Their good behaviour continues around school and on the split-level playgrounds. Older pupils, in particular, show maturity when walking sensibly up and down the long path to their playground.

The areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report have been tackled effectively. The leadership team has been successful in improving the

quality and consistency of teaching and learning across the school. Good use has been made of a range of staff development opportunities, including attending training sessions and meeting with teachers from other schools. Staff have appreciated this support and recognise the positive impact that it has had. One example of this is in the improvement in the way in which teachers use assessment information to ensure that they take into account pupils' different abilities and learning needs when planning activities. This has resulted in an increase over time in the proportion of pupils making good progress with their work. Improvements can also be seen in the quality of pupils' written work. Teachers skilfully develop pupils' writing skills and then provide them with plenty of opportunities to practise and refine their skills by writing in a range of subjects.

While much has been achieved since the last inspection, there is no suggestion that you and your fellow school leaders are content to rest on your laurels. You were disappointed with last year's key stage 2 reading assessment results, which declined having previously been on a similar upward trajectory to results in writing and mathematics. The leadership team quickly analysed the reasons behind this unexpected dip, and as a result have ensured that strategies are now in place to further develop pupils' reading fluency and stamina and to widen their vocabulary. Indications are that pupils' reading skills are developing well, and pupils say that they are enjoying studying classic stories, such as 'Carrie's War', in class. Leaders also recognise that, while the proportion of the most able pupils making accelerated progress has improved over time, more pupils are capable of reaching the very highest standards. For this to happen, teachers need to further develop pupils' skills in using inference and deduction to gain further understanding from the text when reading, and in explaining their mathematical reasoning.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of a high quality. Leaders have successfully established a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the school, and as a result all staff feel a sense of responsibility for pupils' well-being. Staff have a good understanding of what to do if they have a concern about a pupil, and robust procedures are in place to ensure that any such concerns are followed up carefully. Leaders responsible for overseeing safeguarding are knowledgeable and have developed positive relationships with parents, built on mutual trust and respect. Effective links with external agencies are in place, and these help to ensure that the most vulnerable pupils and their families get the help that they need.

Leaders ensure that rigorous checks are made on staff, governors, volunteers and regular visitors to the school to make sure that they are suitable people to work with children. Staff and governors take part in regular training so that they have up-to-date knowledge of the latest good practice in safeguarding. Leaders take great care to make sure that the school site is safe by keeping the external boundary secure and ensuring that breaktimes are well supervised. Pupils also show a good knowledge of how to keep themselves safe, and can talk confidently about topics such as road safety, staying safe online and being alert to the danger that could be

posed by strangers.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on a number of key lines of enquiry. The first of these confirmed that you have taken decisive action to tackle the dip in pupils' attainment in reading in the end of key stage 2 assessments in 2016. The changes that leaders have made to the way reading is taught are having a positive impact and the pupils that I spoke to were very positive about reading. There is still more work to be done. Pupils are confident retelling stories and describing characters, but are not as assured when asked to infer meaning or explain more complicated vocabulary.
- I also wanted to find out if enough pupils were making accelerated progress during their time in school, so that they reached the highest attainment levels. There is clear evidence in pupils' books that teachers do challenge them in lessons, and that pupils are increasingly responding to this level of challenge. This is particularly true in pupils' written work, where the most able pupils write effectively in a number of different styles, including letters and recounts. In mathematics, teachers ensure that pupils are asked to apply their skills to solve a range of problems, and while pupils tackle these challenges determinedly they are less confident when asked to explain their mathematical reasoning.
- The final line of enquiry looked at the quality of provision for the youngest children in the school. Children get off to a flying start to their time at Brookhouse because of high-quality provision in the early years. In a warm and welcoming environment, staff quickly identify children's individual learning needs through effective observations and assessment. They then use this information well to move children's learning forward, matching activities accurately to children's needs and interests. Those children who join the school at an early stage of learning English progress quickly because of an effective focus on language development in the early years. The proportion of children leaving Reception class having achieved a good level of development has increased yearly, and is now just above the national average. This represents strong progress from children's different starting points.
- The quality of leadership shown by yourself and other members of the leadership team, well supported by an effective governing body, is a key strength of the school. The impact of leadership can be seen in the ongoing improvements across the school, such as in the quality of pupils' writing, and also in the speed with which areas of potential concern are identified and tackled. The school website provides one example of governors' effectiveness, as it is easy to use and very comprehensive.
- Brookhouse is an outward-looking school. You work well in collaboration with other local schools, and your partnership with a local university has created many professional development opportunities for staff from your school and other schools in the neighbourhood. This further adds to the school's strong capacity for continued improvement.
- The curriculum at Brookhouse is broad and well balanced. Pupils told me that

they enjoy learning across a wide range of subjects, and were particularly enthusiastic when talking about trips that they had been on which had enhanced their learning, such as to the Roman ruins and museum at Ribchester. The curriculum also very effectively teaches pupils about British values. Pupils were able to express clearly and thoughtfully their views about topics including the European Union referendum and the need to treat all people equally.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers develop pupils' higher-level reading skills, such as inference and deduction, and their confidence when reasoning in mathematics in order to increase the proportion reaching the higher levels of attainment in key stages 1 and 2.

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

Yours sincerely

Neil Dixon

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection I met with you, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher and the leader for early years. I also met a group of teaching and support staff, eight members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I considered 38 responses from parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and spoke to parents at the start of the school day. The 13 responses to the staff survey and 15 responses to the pupil survey were also considered. I met with a group of pupils and heard a number of other pupils read. I visited classes with you and the deputy headteacher to observe teaching and learning in a number of subjects, and I also looked at pupils' work. I also looked at a range of documentation covering different aspects of the school's work.