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25 July 2017

Mr Paul Newby
Headteacher
Brickhouse Primary School
Dudhill Road
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Dear Mr Newby

Short inspection of Brickhouse Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 July 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 February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

You are a passionate leader and a remarkably strong advocate for every single pupil in your school. Your belief that all pupils can and will achieve is unwavering and you have the determination and drive to make that happen. No stone is left unturned as you continually seek ways to improve the chances for every pupil in your school. As one pupil said, 'We are all special, we are all different.' This ethos permeates throughout the school.

Pupils in your school are happy and confident. They demonstrate excellent learning behaviours in lessons. Very positive relationships exist between staff and pupils across the school. Pupils appreciate the efforts of staff to make their learning fun and to provide them with interesting activities during breaktimes. For example, at lunchtimes there are the 'creative' and the 'games' zones, as well as a range of sporting activities for pupils to choose from. There is something for everyone to enjoy. The 'calm' zone after lunchtime gives pupils the opportunity to relax and refocus ready for the afternoon's learning. These initiatives have also helped to greatly improve behaviour at lunchtimes and in the afternoons. There is a calm and orderly environment across the school which supports the good teaching and learning taking place.

Your forward-thinking and detailed improvement planning is exceptional. You, ably

supported by your senior leaders, monitor the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' progress very carefully. You accurately identify the strengths of the school, but also very quickly identify where further improvement is needed. You take swift action to address any development areas, including providing staff with extra support when needed. All staff within the school embrace every opportunity to improve. You check in detail that the development actions taken are improving outcomes for pupils. As a result, the school continues to go from strength to strength. However, while you and your senior leaders are driving school improvement exceptionally well, leaders at all levels need training to further develop their skills at devising their own improvement plans in response to their analysis of pupils' progress and attainment.

Following the last inspection, you were asked to increase the proportion of pupils making good progress in mathematics. You have successfully achieved this. At the end of key stage 2 in 2016, pupils' progress in mathematics was significantly above the national average. The school's assessment information at the end of 2017 shows that pupils in all year groups, including disadvantaged pupils, are making at least expected progress, and in the majority of year groups, better than expected progress.

The progress in reading and writing of the most able children in the early years was also identified as a development area in the last inspection. This has been successfully achieved. The proportions of children achieving a good level of development at the end of early years has risen over the last three years and in 2016 was slightly above the national average. There is high-quality teaching of phonics across Nursery and Reception, which is helping all groups of children to make good progress in their reading and writing.

The teaching of phonics is also of a high quality across key stage 1. Pupils make rapid gains in their learning and use the letter sounds they have learned confidently in their reading. However, the most able pupils in key stage 1 do not have reading books which are sufficiently challenging. Consequently, while they are making good progress in reading, they are not making the progress of which they are fully capable.

You have introduced a consistent approach to the teaching of writing across the school. Pupils have the opportunity to write in a range of different styles and at length. Grammar, spelling and punctuation are taught well, and pupils apply the skills they have learned in these areas in their writing. However, teachers' expectations of what the most able pupils can achieve in writing are not high enough. There are too many missed opportunities to challenge the most able and deepen their learning in writing. As a result, while the vast majority of pupils are making good progress in writing, the most able pupils are not making as much progress as they could.

A new approach to the teaching of joined handwriting has recently been introduced. Even at this early stage, improvements in pupils' handwriting can be seen across the school. However, on some occasions, teachers' expectations of pupils'

presentation are not high enough. This results in inconsistent presentation of pupils' work, with some pieces of writing being very neat, and others quite untidy.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and are of the highest quality. The culture of safeguarding across the school is exceptional, with all staff placing the highest priority on keeping pupils safe. All concerns about pupils are followed up swiftly. Leaders challenge agencies robustly when they feel that their concerns are not being sufficiently followed up. Checks on adults working in the school are thorough, and all measures are taken to ensure that newly appointed staff pose no risk to pupils.

Pupils have a well-developed understanding of safety, including road and pool safety. They learn about how to keep themselves safe when using computers, especially the internet. They understand what bullying is and what to do if it happens. However, they say that bullying rarely happens in school. Pupils say that there is always someone that they can turn to for help in school.

Inspection findings

- Governors have a determination to ensure that the school continuously improves. They are very proactive and have embraced every opportunity to develop their effectiveness. A review of governance highlighted their strengths but also where they could improve. Governors acted swiftly to address these areas of development, including how to challenge information provided to them by leaders more robustly. As the chair said, 'Paul tells, we challenge.'
- Regular visits to the school help governors to have a deeper understanding of the school's performance. Governors also ensure that they develop relationships with staff and pupils and each governor is linked to a class. They meet pupils to ensure that they are listening to their views. Simple activities, such as designing Easter eggs, give pupils further opportunities to express their views to governors, as evidenced with the 'Egg Sheeran' design by one pupil which also included their views on the school.
- Leaders' efforts to improve attendance and punctuality have been highly effective. Leaders track pupils' attendance in fine detail and any pupil whose attendance drops is identified swiftly. Leaders then take action to improve this attendance, including making home visits where necessary. An attendance officer works with the school on a monthly basis to support this work, and provides further support to families to improve the attendance of their children. Leaders do not shy away from taking robust action when attendance does not improve. Consequently, attendance has improved and is at least in line with national figures. Persistent absence has halved over the last year.
- Leaders ensure that meeting the needs of disadvantaged pupils is a high priority. The additional funding for these pupils is used in a variety of ways to support not only their academic progress, but also their social and emotional needs. The pastoral manager and learning mentor support both families and pupils. The

school has achieved the Leading Parent Partnership Award and The Well-Being Charter Mark, a testament to the importance leaders place on engaging parents in the life of the school. Disadvantaged pupils are making at least expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics, and in many cases, better than expected progress. Their progress in all year groups currently is at least in line with non-disadvantaged pupils in school.

- There is high-quality phonics teaching across the early years and key stage 1. All staff have high expectations of what children and pupils can achieve. The very youngest children in Nursery are given opportunities to apply the sounds learned in writing and are showing good skills in developing their letter formation. Good progress in phonics is evident in all year groups. The most able pupils in Year 2 are moved further forward and learn about more complex spelling patterns once they have a secure understanding of phonics. Pupils apply the use of phonics in their reading and writing. However, the most able pupils in key stage 1 do not have reading books which challenge them sufficiently. As a result, these pupils do not make as much progress as they should.
- There is a consistent approach to the teaching of reading across key stage 2. Pupils are clear about the expectations of the sessions and show a high level of engagement in their reading. The reading sessions focus on ensuring that reading skills are taught, such as inference and retrieving information from a text, and then pupils are given the opportunity to apply these skills to the text they are studying. Challenging texts are matched to pupils' needs, especially the most able, to support them to make good progress in their reading. Highly effective questioning by all staff challenges pupils' thinking and deepens their learning. As a result, pupils are now making better progress in reading across key stage 2, with the majority making at least expected, and some better than expected progress.
- There is a consistent approach to the teaching of writing across the school. Teachers focus on developing pupils' writing skills in a range of styles such as descriptive and persuasive writing, letters and writing instructions. Grammar, punctuation and spelling are taught regularly and pupils apply these skills in their writing. Pupils have many opportunities to write at length to further develop their writing.
- However, while the majority of pupils are making good progress in writing, the most able pupils are not sufficiently challenged. Teachers do not plan to meet the needs of these pupils well enough. While books show that the most able pupils are making expected progress in writing, they are not making the progress of which they are fully capable.
- The introduction of the new handwriting scheme is having a positive impact on developing pupils' handwriting skills. Improvements in handwriting can be seen in a short amount of time. However, teachers' expectations of pupils' presentation are not consistently high enough. Consequently, there is too much variation in the quality of work presented in English books.
- The local authority has a very positive working relationship with the school. They provide effective support which is wholeheartedly embraced by leaders. This is further supporting the rapid improvements in the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leaders at all levels receive training to further develop their skills of analysing pupils' progress and developing improvement plans based on this analysis
- the most able pupils in key stage 1 have reading books appropriately matched to their abilities
- the most able pupils are challenged in writing to achieve the standards of which they are fully capable
- teachers insist that pupils consistently present their work to the best of their ability.

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

Yours sincerely

Ann Pritchard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, the chair of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. You joined me on brief visits to lessons. I talked to pupils about their learning and looked at examples of their work. I observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime and lunchtime. I spoke to parents before school and to pupils throughout the day. I reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's own evaluation of its performance, the school development plan, documents relating to keeping pupils safe, attendance information and the most recent information about pupils' achievement. I considered the responses from Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, from parents. There were no responses from the staff or pupils' questionnaires.