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Janet Baker
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Dear Ms Baker

Short inspection of Brook Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 September 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 April 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 and the deputy headteacher have been in post a very short time. You are both determined that the school will continue to improve. You have already noted some areas where adjustments and changes can be made to maintain the momentum of improvement. You understand the need to do this in a measured fashion and are making sure to take staff along with you. There is no doubting the strong spirit of teamwork that exists among staff, or their willingness to listen to advice and to work for the benefit of the pupils.

At the start of the day, you mentioned that 'There are things that make the school special.' I saw considerable strengths in aspects of the school's work. Staff put a lot of emphasis on pastoral care, for example. They support and nurture pupils where they need it, so that they become ready and able to learn. The well-established 'learning pathways' help pupils develop the skills and attitudes they need to become successful learners. Staff clearly have many skills in helping children who are struggling or who are facing troubles in their lives. Relationships between staff and pupils are strong. Several parents recognised this and commented on how well the staff help their children to grow and develop as individuals. One parent wrote, 'It is such a pleasure to see my daughter walk to school each day confident and, more importantly, happy.' Another wrote, 'My son has been given support, kindness and, if necessary, a telling off!'

The school environment is well organised, bright and inviting, indoors and out. This sends clear messages to pupils that they are important and are valued. Displays around the school reflect a broad and stimulating curriculum. The school offers a wide range of clubs and activities, including learning to play a musical instrument, that broaden children's horizons and enrich their experiences.

Pupils have many chances to contribute to school life and to learn how to be a good citizen. The school council, for example, plays a prominent role in school. At their meeting during this inspection, the new school council members listened carefully to one another. They contributed their own ideas in a thoughtful and respectful way.

The atmosphere in school is calm and orderly. All the pupils that I met and observed around the school and in class were well behaved and polite. They were keen to talk about their work and their learning.

The previous leaders completed an accurate self-evaluation of the school's effectiveness. It points out what the school does well and where further work is needed. These areas for development are included in the plan for improvement. The plan is not as sharp a tool as it could be, which limits its potential. There is some confusion between what will be done and what the intended outcomes are. In addition, there are no measurable targets to help judge success. This makes it harder for leaders and governors to check just how well things are progressing over time and to evaluate how effective actions have been.

You have noted during your early monitoring activities that the school's approach to the teaching of phonics and early reading is not as precise and rigorous as it should be. Not all staff have a deep understanding of how to teach phonics. Observations during this inspection confirm your findings. You have already started to act. You intend to revise the school's approach and supplement this with training for staff, so that pupils make faster progress and quickly learn the skills they need to become effective readers.

The school's leaders focused carefully on the areas for improvement highlighted at the last inspection and behaviour monitoring visit. The areas have been successfully addressed. Good attention is given to developing pupils' speaking skills. For example, teachers make sure that pupils have plenty of chances to discuss their work with one another and to explain their thinking to the whole class. The recorded voices of the head boy and head girl confidently ring out over the loudspeakers throughout the day, telling everyone when it is time for lunch or break. The level of challenge in lessons, particularly for the most able pupils, has also been a focus. This was one of the lines of enquiry for this inspection. The findings are reported below.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have established a strong culture of safeguarding at Brook. They have made sure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. The staff know the local area and its

challenges well, and understand the difficulties that children and families can face. Staff make sure that vulnerable pupils are quickly identified and action is taken to support them, including where 'early help' from other agencies is appropriate. In school, the 'Bears' nurture group gives good support to pupils who are potentially vulnerable. Several staff are trained in the use of physical intervention and are skilled in managing challenging behaviour.

Staff receive regular training and leaders carry out checks to make sure they understand how to meet their responsibilities. As a result, staff know that they need to be vigilant and what to look out for. Where needed, referrals to the local authority are made in a timely way. Leaders are tenacious in making sure that referrals are followed up and that action taken is appropriate.

Pupils are taught how to recognise risks, including online, and how to keep themselves safe. In the first week of this term, pupils have worked on a topic from the NSPCC which teaches children that their body belongs to them and to tell a trusted adult if they are worried. Parents, staff and pupils themselves agree that Brook keeps pupils safe.

Inspection findings

- Outcomes for children at the end of the Reception Year in 2017 showed a marked improvement on previous years. The proportion of children who attained a good level of development grew considerably and is above last year's national figure. Differences in attainment between boys and girls were greatly reduced. The differences in attainment between children who are eligible for free school meals and other children also reduced. Children made strong progress from their starting points on entry.
- These improvements have come about for several reasons. Staff in the early years focus more closely on children's next steps. An additional teacher has been appointed to work with the pre-school children. The early years leader works across both the pre-school and Reception classes. Specific interventions have been used to boost children's progress. All these initiatives have had a positive impact. Interventions take account of areas of learning where children have not achieved so well in the past. They include activities designed to improve children's coordination, for example. A sizeable proportion of children start in pre-school with poorly developed communication skills. Staff work closely and effectively with speech and language therapists to boost children's progress in this aspect of their development.
- In 2016, the school's results at the end of key stage 2 did not match those of previous years. Results recovered somewhat in 2017. This inspection focused on making sure that improvements are likely to be maintained in years to come and that pupils are making at least good progress over time. A detailed scrutiny of pupils' books showed that, over the course of last year, pupils built well on their prior learning. In English, for example, there were clear and substantial improvements in pupils' use of punctuation and their grammatical knowledge. In addition, pupils' ability to write with imagination and an understanding of

audience developed well.

- Work in pupils' topic books showed that they used these skills well in other subjects, such as history and geography. The books contain detailed assessments of the development of skills and knowledge across a range of subjects and show that pupils make good progress.
- The school's assessments have been carefully checked with other schools and external partners. They show that pupils make good progress across the school in reading, writing and mathematics. If pupils' progress begins to lag behind that of others, effective steps are taken to help them catch up. This includes the use of short-term and carefully targeted interventions.
- The school's assessments show that the proportions of pupils working within the standard expected for their age and working at greater depth are growing across the school. The results of standardised reading tests also show positive progress over time. Pupils are moving on well from their starting points at the end of Year 2.
- One of the school's continuing priorities has been to make sure that those pupils who have the potential to achieve highly make good progress and do as well as they can. Teachers understand fully the need to make sure that all pupils, not only those who are high prior attainers, are suitably challenged in lessons. Over the past year, teachers have presented work for pupils at different levels of challenge and difficulty. Pupils can choose which level of challenge to work at. Teachers make sure, however, that pupils make the right choice and that they do not spend time on work that is too easy. Typically, pupils choose to stretch themselves. Teachers do not set a ceiling on what pupils can learn or achieve in lessons.
- This arrangement worked successfully in lessons observed during this inspection. In mathematics, pupils readily grappled with challenging problems that made them think. When asked, they explained their thinking and gave the reasons for their answers. They worked well with others, discussing their hypotheses and coming to agreements about the accuracy of their answers.
- The school's assessments show that, across the school, a substantial proportion of pupils are working at greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Staff in Year 6 know exactly which pupils attained highly at the end of key stage 1. They are making every effort to make sure they do the same at the end of key stage 2 next year.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- staff receive training to make sure their understanding of how to teach phonics and early reading is strong; they should make sure that the school's approach to teaching phonics and early reading is reviewed and amended where necessary
- the school's plan for improvement is adjusted so that it is clear what action is to be taken and what the intended results are; the plan should include some readily

measurable targets.

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

Yours sincerely

Linda McGill
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you and the acting deputy headteacher to discuss the school's self-evaluation and plans for improvement. We agreed the areas of focus for the inspection. I discussed the school's approach to safeguarding with the deputy headteacher who is the designated safeguarding lead. I met the early years leader and met with the chair of the governing body and two other governors. I attended a meeting of the school council.

I visited classrooms to observe teaching and learning, talking informally with pupils about their work and looking at their books. To find out how well pupils make progress over time, I looked in depth at the work completed over the previous academic year by a sample of pupils from all year groups. I scrutinised the school's record of recruitment and vetting checks and other documents relating to safeguarding. I looked at the displays in classrooms, corridors and around the school. I examined documents, including the school's plan for improvement, assessment information, and information on the school's website. I took account of the 27 responses made by parents on the Parent View website, including free-text comments. I also examined the views of 28 members of staff and 44 pupils who completed online questionnaires.