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Ms Marianne Brand
Principal
Blackthorns Community Primary Academy
3 Blackthorns Close
Lindfield
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Dear Ms Brand

Short inspection of Blackthorns Community Primary Academy

Following my visit to the school on 15 March 2018, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in February 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

You and your leaders are dedicated to ensuring that all aspects of the school are as strong as they can be. You pursue this aim with passion, determination and vigour. As a result of your firm commitment, all pupils are supported extremely well and thrive in your school. You have an in-depth knowledge of each pupil's individual strengths and weaknesses, and you work closely with all staff to ensure that pupils' needs are fully met. You are ably supported in this work by your vice principal. He, in turn, successfully ensures that staff employ their expert knowledge and skills in their work with pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. You agree that the way you track the personal and emotional development of pupils in the specialist provision needs further development.

Teachers, support assistants, leaders and those responsible for governance all have extremely high expectations of pupils' achievements and work. Teaching staff's strong subject knowledge, enthusiasm and passion enable pupils to reach their potential. Local board members and trustees are very well informed. They provide both challenge and support for you and other leaders. Staff are proud to work at

the school. They feel supported and valued by the leadership team.

You and your leaders have an accurate view of the school. As a result, you have put a range of initiatives in place to improve progress in writing, and this has had a positive impact on the way pupils write across the curriculum. Pupils were keen to tell me how much their writing had improved.

You have successfully tackled all the areas for improvement from your previous inspection and strengthened the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school. Teaching across the curriculum is exciting and innovative. You have made sure that pupils benefit from additional specialist subject teaching on a weekly basis. For example, all pupils learn the ukulele. You have increased the role played by leaders at all levels and now have a strong and effective senior leadership team. However, not all subject leaders have had enough time to disseminate new and successful approaches to their colleagues, so that all pupils can benefit.

Pupils are exceptionally well behaved and polite. They participate in a purposeful manner, showing high levels of engagement in class. They are proud of their work and enjoy learning. The school is clean and calm with interesting and stimulating displays. Pupils talked enthusiastically to me about their school and how much they enjoyed the varied, exciting school trips, such as their recent visit to a local nature reserve. Older pupils told me with pride about their roles on the school council and the 'eco committee'. It was clear that they enjoyed, and benefited from, helping their 'Reception buddies'. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school. One parent, echoing the views of many, stated that they 'couldn't ask for a better school'.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements in the school are fit for purpose and meet your pupils' specific needs. Records are detailed and of a high quality and staff training is appropriate and up to date. As a result, members of staff are able to spot any problems and deal with them quickly and effectively.

You and your team all have in-depth knowledge of individual pupils and a nurturing approach to the emotional well-being of pupils. Combined, these qualities make a very effective contribution to keeping pupils safe. You often take the lead in liaising with outside agencies. When you deem it necessary, you challenge the local authority's welfare officers to make sure that appropriate support is available for vulnerable pupils.

This is a caring school in which pupils feel safe and have a good level of awareness of how to keep themselves safe, including when they are online. They know who to go to with any concerns and told me that there are 'always staff around who will help us'.

Inspection findings

- Teaching across the school is interesting, exciting and engages pupils, helping them develop their skills. As a result, pupils really enjoy their lessons and are eager to learn. Staff have a thorough understanding of pupils' needs and lessons are made accessible to all. Systems for tracking progress are robust and accurate and assessments are moderated fully within school and externally. Current pupils make strong progress from their starting points and make better than average progress nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. Reading is a particular strength of the school.
- Your recent focus on writing was prompted by a decline in pupils' progress in writing in 2016. Since then, pupils' achievement in writing has improved significantly. A scrutiny of pupils' work demonstrated examples of very strong progress in all subjects in key stages 1 and 2 and in the early years. Pupils' work shows that the quality of their vocabulary and composition is high. There is also clear evidence that pupils write effectively for different purposes and audiences. The pride pupils take in their work is evident in their neat and tidy presentation.
- Regular monitoring allows leaders to effectively track the progress of individual pupils in detail and to challenge and support teachers to improve standards still further. Subject leaders work with teachers to share ideas and approaches, and to moderate pupils' work across the year groups. They are starting to disseminate helpful and innovative strategies that boost pupils' learning. However, the improvements introduced by subject leaders have not had enough time to be fully embedded throughout the school.
- The proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of Reception Year has increased steadily over recent years and is above the national average. The indoor and outdoor learning environments are stimulating, well organised and allow children to develop confidence. Children are excited about learning and, during the inspection, one group of children were keen to tell me about the sunflower they were planting and how it was going to 'grow as tall as the sky'.
- Your specialist support base is a nurturing environment where pupils thrive. Teaching is tailored to meet individual needs. Staff are extremely skilled in strategies to promote the learning of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Targets for these pupils are aspirational and very strong progress can be seen in many areas, not just in their academic learning. Effective support enables pupils to join in lessons with everyone else in the afternoons and highly personalised support ensures that pupils are able to reach their potential. However, you have acknowledged that your tracking system does not show enough about the strong progress pupils make in their personal and social development.
- School local board members are very involved in the life of the school and have an in-depth knowledge of strengths and areas for further improvement. The multi-academy trust (MAT) provides effective school improvement support and has made an extremely positive impact on teaching and learning. The MAT is a very active part of the school and has helped members of the local board to develop their understanding of educational issues and pupils' progress data. The

local board members stated that the support they receive from the MAT is 'phenomenal'. The MAT, trustees and local board members have made sure that there are clear systems in place to hold leaders and themselves to account for standards in the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the personal progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is tracked more fully, in order to celebrate their achievements in areas other than their academic learning
- new and successful strategies are fully embedded across the school to make sure that all pupils make the strong progress of which they are capable.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for West Sussex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Maxine McDonald-Taylor
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and other leaders. You and your vice principal accompanied me in making short visits to classes in a range of subjects across all key stages, including the specialist provision base. I spoke to pupils in class where appropriate and looked through their work with them, allowing them to explain what they were learning. I held a meeting with leaders to discuss pupils' attainment and progress. I also met separately with your designated safeguarding leader. I met with a group of pupils to hear their views about school life and observed pupils at breaktime. A meeting was held with some of the trustees from the MAT together with members of the local governing body. I considered responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and spoke to parents and carers at the end of the school day. I also considered the views of staff and pupils from their online questionnaires. I scrutinised a wide range of school documentation and a selection of pupils' work.