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Mr Barney Rycroft
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Rycroft

Short inspection of Blackbrook Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 11 April 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 the school was judged to be good in October 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school. You have overseen and led a change to the leadership structure across the school, which has resulted in a passionate, well-informed team. Regardless of each leader's area of responsibility, they each speak knowledgeably about all age ranges, school performance and current improvement strategies. This team is highly effective in bringing about positive change. All staff have performance management targets that link directly to the school improvement plan. Leaders monitor targets regularly and staff are focused on the whole-school priorities. Training equips them to fulfil their roles and responsibilities effectively. Your ethos of 'everyone's a leader' has permeated the school. As a result, standards have improved year on year.

Across the school, behaviour and attitudes to learning are a strength. Pupils who form part of the learning council and school council are quick to welcome visitors to the school and play a major role in the strategic vision of the school. They meet with you regularly and their actions are evident in the day-to-day running of the school. Pupils enjoy their lessons and contribute enthusiastically. Furthermore, pupils' books demonstrate pride in their learning and are presented immaculately throughout.

The school improvement plan is central to all activity across the school. It is a current and accurate working document which leaders and governors use effectively to bring about further improvement. As each year has gone by, this document has become more refined and specific. This is indicative of your effective leadership and your relentless drive. Leaders and staff access this plan and ensure that all activity,

whether training, monitoring or working with other schools, is specific and focused on targets within the plan. As a result, improvements are evident and the school continues to improve as you strive for excellence.

You have developed a curriculum which is designed to meet the needs of your pupils and you pride yourself on developing the whole child in terms of social and emotional progress as well as academic. This approach has led to a highly relevant curriculum which pupils enjoy and within which they make strong progress. Your staff contextualise learning for the pupils, as per your approach, and bring learning to life through practical and real experiences. While you are open to embracing new initiatives and ideas, you are selective about which ideas make it into the classroom. Through trials and research, you determine which initiatives are worthy to form part of the learning experience for pupils in your school. Only then will they form part of your curriculum offer. Consequently, the curriculum is high in quality and relevant for all pupils.

The governing body is a clear strength of the school. Governors have an accurate, well-informed overview and can show evidence that they hold leaders to account when they have any concerns or questions about an area of school performance. The governing body is highly effective and focuses its activities on the school improvement plan. Through this and regular monitoring, it has its 'finger on the pulse' and is well placed to drive further improvements. Governors' frequent monitoring and evaluation has resulted in sustained improvements. Governors cross-reference all activities with current improvement targets. This ensures that the focus is not diluted.

Safeguarding is effective.

You ensure that safeguarding has a high profile across the school. You ensure that individuals who wish to work at the school are subject to thorough recruitment checks so that you can be sure they are suitable to work with children. Once they are appointed, this information is effectively recorded on the school's single central register. Through frequent monitoring and scrutiny, the single central register is kept current and aligns with the information kept in staff files. Once employed, staff complete a thorough induction programme which ensures that they are able to carry out their roles and responsibilities. Frequent refresher training is also available to make sure that all staff have access to current updates on safeguarding. Furthermore, you share information with staff through means of a safeguarding newsletter. As a result, staff are well trained to fulfil their statutory duties and are kept up to date on current safeguarding issues.

When adults have concerns about a pupil, they know whom to pass these concerns on to and they ensure that all concerns, however seemingly minor, make their way to the relevant person. These concerns are well recorded and leaders are vigilant in making sure that external agencies are informed when concerns warrant additional attention. Leaders' actions are proportionate to the concerns that arise. Leaders have also worked closely with Halcon One, a local initiative whose aims are to share information where concerns arise, as well as to prevent incidents occurring. Leaders

praise this initiative and can evidence where it has resulted in a reduced risk for pupils who may be vulnerable.

Inspection findings

- At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed on the key lines of enquiry to consider during the day. First, I considered how leaders' actions are improving pupils' progress in writing across key stage 1, particularly for lower- and middle-attaining pupils. Second, I considered how teaching, learning and assessment support pupils across key stage 2 to work at the higher standard in reading, particularly for middle- and high-attaining pupils. Finally, I considered how teaching, learning and assessment support girls across key stage 2 to make strong progress in mathematics.
- Children begin their writing journey with a strong start in the Reception class. They write regularly and build writing stamina over time. In class, all activities tie in to a quality text and pupils opt to write independently. An example of this was a link to the book, 'Monkey puzzle'. While some children chose to write, others were enjoying seeking animals in the jungle, enthusiastically sharing what they could see through their binoculars. Children take up opportunities for high-quality speaking and listening together. Adults are well-skilled in questioning and supporting these interactions, further promoting language and rich vocabulary. As a result, children's writing improves across the academic year and children are well prepared for key stage 1.
- As pupils move into key stage 1, the pace of progress continues. In lessons, pupils rehearse, refine and practise their ideas. Whether pupils are sounding out words they are spelling, checking whether sentences make sense, or editing, they demonstrate care and a sense of pride. This pride seamlessly transfers into pupils' workbooks. Writing books are immaculately presented and cared for across key stage 1. Pupils and adults, demonstrating the high expectations set out by all leaders, care for each workbook. This further confirms how the school focus on promoting independent, reflective learners is having an impact from a young age. Teachers' feedback moves learning on. Where suggestions are made to improve a piece of writing, pupils act on these swiftly. Pupils value the feedback given to them and act on it effectively. Over time, books show progress in handwriting, spelling, sentence structure and in writing stamina. As a result of leaders' actions and high-quality teaching, learning and assessment, pupils who left the Reception Year working at or below expectations for their age are making strong progress, with some of these pupils now also working at the higher standard.
- Next I considered how teaching, learning and assessment support middle- and higher-attaining pupils across key stage 2 to work at the higher standard in reading. For 2016 and 2017, published outcomes show that the proportion of pupils from these groups that were working at the higher standard by the end of key stage 2 was below national averages. Leaders have placed reading at the heart of the curriculum and the school improvement plan. The focus of reading is not limited to key stage 2. It is clear that leaders' actions are seen throughout the school, with more pupils securing a stronger start to key stage 2 through a

high-quality key stage 1 experience.

- By the end of Year 2, pupils experience high-quality reading sessions and receive questioning across a range of genres and texts, including some related to historical events such as the case of Rosa Parks. Teachers effectively challenge pupils' understanding, and expectations are high. Examples of questions include 'Why did you think Rosa wouldn't move from her seat on the bus?' and 'If you had sat next to Rosa Parks, what would you have done and why?' These evoke strong pupil responses and demonstrate their understanding of what they have read, as well as their maturity in handling key issues. Pupils' workbooks demonstrate wide and varied access to rich questioning and other activities which develop key skills, such as prediction, inference and language comprehension.
- Pupils move seamlessly from key stage 1 into key stage 2. In classes, pupils have access to quality, age-appropriate, texts which form the heart of the curriculum offer. Books such as 'Toro toro' and 'Holes' provide inspiration for both reading and writing. School initiatives, such as reading champions, reading buddies and other incentives to read, ensure that pupils read widely and often. Through high-quality teaching, supported by a rich book stock, pupils develop a love of reading. They immerse themselves fully in the book they are reading and reading records show that pupils 'stick with a book' to see it through in its entirety.
- In reading sessions, expectation that pupils can achieve prevents a culture of dependency. Challenge is evident for all pupils and they are eager to meet the high expectations. Teachers skilfully plan activities to build on pupils' existing knowledge. This process is aided by accurate assessments which staff and leaders review regularly, to make sure that activities meet the needs of all pupils. Expectations in lessons are made clear. Pupils know what they are learning, how well they are doing and, through leaders' clever curriculum design, pupils apply across the curriculum what they have learned, including their skills of writing. Leaders acknowledge that the priority is to embed the strategies further to improve outcomes in reading, so that more pupils are working at the higher standard across key stage 2.
- Finally, I considered how teaching, learning and assessment are improving the progress that girls across key stage 2 make in mathematics. For 2016 and 2017, published outcomes show that girls made weaker progress than boys in mathematics. Leaders have identified that work is needed to improve girls' outcomes in mathematics and have placed this in the school improvement plan.
- Pupils' workbooks are immaculate and show a clear, well-designed mathematics curriculum. Teachers closely consider assessment information when planning lessons and ensure that the level of challenge for each pupil meets their needs and supports progress. Learning journeys are clear and teachers plan well-designed activities to build on pupils' prior knowledge. Teachers provide activities for pupils which help them to meet the desired learning outcomes, which results in strong progress in lessons. Leaders have embraced initiatives to bring about further improvements for girls in mathematics. From engaging parents, through to providing additional support for girls before, during and after school, leaders are adamant that outcomes for this group of pupils will improve. Current progress for girls across key stage 2 shows that they are making progress in line

with school expectations.

- Leaders continue to consider with care studies surrounding girls' attitudes and attainment in mathematics. Through frequent, in-depth monitoring, leaders are effectively identifying the barriers to learning for this set of pupils and continually act on their findings. Furthermore, leaders speak with confidence and accuracy about standards in this subject across the school. They know which pupils are at risk of falling behind and effective interventions are put in place. Another strand of effective work was the implementation of a set of 'non-negotiables', which has been instrumental in raising standards in mathematics.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the effective approach to improve outcomes in reading is embedded so that more pupils across key stage 2 are working at the higher standard.

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

Yours sincerely

Nathan Kemp
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I spoke to you and your deputy headteacher. I also met with your leader for phonics, your key stage 1 and 2 leaders and the literacy and mathematics leader. I also spoke with representatives of the governing body. You and I made visits to lessons to observe pupils' attitudes to learning. When visiting key stage 2 classes, we were greeted by representatives of the learning council. We also scrutinised the work in pupils' mathematics and writing books, as well as pupils' reading records.

I looked at a range of documentary evidence, which included the school's self-evaluation and the current school improvement plan, as well as progress and attainment information. I also scrutinised various safeguarding records, including those relating to the suitability of staff to work with children, to staff training and to the school's work with external agencies to ensure that pupils are kept safe.

I took account of 57 responses to the Parent View online survey, 21 responses to the staff survey and 23 responses to the pupil survey.