

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)



22 May 2018

Mrs Judith Hodgson  
Headteacher  
Brandon Primary School  
Carr Avenue  
Brandon  
Durham  
County Durham  
DH7 8NL

Dear Mrs Hodgson

### **Short inspection of Brandon Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 3 May 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 June 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Over the past two years, you have provided much stability and purpose during a period of staffing change. You have developed the roles of senior leaders, enabling them to lead important initiatives on assessment and attendance. In addition, you are developing a new team of phase leaders who are responding with enthusiasm and conviction to their new responsibilities. You have developed more rigorous processes to monitor the quality of teaching and learning and have worked with local schools to further evaluate standards. In meetings with staff and in their responses to questionnaires, it is clear that you have maintained good staff morale and that your team is committed to improving the progress, well-being and wider experiences of the pupils in their care.

You have shown a good awareness of areas for improvement and are developing new strategies to improve pupils' progress in these areas. You have reviewed provision in the early years to establish routines and practices that will better prepare children for Year 1. In addition, you have worked with colleagues to introduce a range of initiatives to improve standards of reading across the school. In lessons, teachers are developing approaches to encourage pupils to analyse texts in greater detail. In addition, you are developing stronger links with parents to develop their roles in supporting their child's reading. These approaches are at an

early stage, but there are signs that activities to develop vocabulary are enhancing the quality of pupils' writing.

Your leaders are developing new assessment systems to help them monitor pupils' progress more effectively. These systems are giving senior leaders a better overview of pupils' progress in particular classes. In addition, new phase leaders are developing their roles in overseeing planning and the quality of teaching in their phases. They have started the process of checking the quality of work under the guidance of senior leaders, although they are less experienced in measuring the effect of improvement strategies. Phase leaders demonstrated a good understanding of the new strategies being introduced to support progress in reading and writing, but initiatives to increase pupils' progress in mathematics are less well developed.

In recent years, there has been some variability in pupils' outcomes across key stages. In 2017, pupils made weaker progress than that seen nationally in reading and writing at the end of key stage 2. However, in the same year, the proportion of pupils reaching expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics did show improvement. Pupils made better progress at key stage 1 in 2017, achieving outcomes close to those seen nationally. In the early years, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development has been close to that seen nationally. The current progress of pupils shows variability between classes, and this is more marked at key stage 2.

At the last inspection, leaders were advised to increase opportunities for pupils to develop their speech skills and to develop the roles of subject leaders. In lessons and in meetings, pupils demonstrated an ability and willingness to share their thoughts and explain the reasons behind their choice of words or calculation methods. You have taken action to develop the roles of previous leaders and are now in the process of beginning this process once again with a largely new team of senior and phase leaders. These processes have started, although colleagues remain in the early stages of their leadership journey.

The governing body has the inherent expertise to provide support and challenge to school leaders. With backgrounds in education, human resources and local community support groups, they have the appropriate knowledge of the school and the wider community. They carry out regular visits to the school to review teaching, progress and pupils' perceptions of different aspects of school life. As new assessment systems develop, their roles in reviewing current progress will strengthen.

### **Safeguarding is effective**

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders make thorough checks on the suitability of adults working at the school and also check that leaders are trained in safer recruitment practices. They ensure that staff receive up-to-date training on a range of safeguarding issues. Leaders are highly attentive to pupils' welfare needs and pursue concerns over

pupils' welfare vigorously and record them thoroughly. They maintain close links with families and external agencies to support children and families.

In meetings and in their substantial response to pupil questionnaires, the majority of pupils said that they feel safe in school. The vast majority of their parents agree. A minority of pupils did express some concerns over behaviour and aspects of bullying. The majority of pupils believe that teachers are good at resolving instances of bullying. Pupils act as anti-bullying champions to provide further support to one another. Pupils showed an awareness of how to stay safe online and the actions that they could take to avoid the potential harm posed by strangers.

### **Inspection findings**

- Leaders are introducing initiatives to improve pupils' progress at key stage 2. A renewed focus on reading across the school is enabling pupils to read with greater focus. Pupils in Year 6 were seen exploring vocabulary and aspects of meaning inferred by writers. There is evidence, particularly in Year 4, of pupils demonstrating increasing confidence in their writing, both in their selection of vocabulary and in their sentence construction. Pupils' current progress in mathematics is more variable across year groups and the effect of improvement strategies is less apparent.
- At key stage 1 in 2017, the majority of pupils made stronger progress and achieved higher standards than in previous years. There are signs that current pupils are making good progress from starting points, although a number are still working below their age-related expectations. Leaders are aware of this and are reviewing the transition from the early years to key stage 1 to provide greater continuity in the curriculum.
- Leaders have used additional funding for disadvantaged pupils to provide extra teacher and teaching assistant support and to broker further assistance from the parent support adviser. In addition, specific initiatives have been introduced to support pupils' progress in reading and mathematics. Leaders have also used funding to increase participation in extra-curricular activities, including sports, to promote pupils' health and physical development. In 2017, disadvantaged pupils made weaker progress in reading and writing at key stage 2. The progress of disadvantaged pupils improved at key stage 1, and differences in their attainment, compared with others nationally, diminished. For current pupils, there is evidence that progress is increasing, although significant gaps in attainment persist in some year groups.
- The deputy headteacher has introduced a range of strategies to improve pupils' attendance. She works alongside the parent support adviser to support and challenge families to address absence more rigorously. In recent months, text messages have been issued to parents whose children are at risk of lower attendance, and parents are being asked to account for their child's absence in more formal ways. These approaches have led to improvements in attendance over the last half-term. More significantly, leaders' actions have contributed to improvements in the attendance of pupils who previously had high rates of absence. These approaches are gaining traction, but much more needs to be

done as overall absence remains above average.

- Over time, pupils have made good progress from their starting points in the early years. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development is in line with that seen nationally. More recently, leaders have reviewed provision to address areas where pupils' skills are less developed in order to prepare them more fully for key stage 1. New routines are in place to strengthen pupils' physical development through activities that enhance their handling skills and abilities to hold a pencil. In addition, there has been a renewed focus on developing children's reading and number skills to address some of the dips in pupils' progress that previously surfaced at key stage 1.
- Teachers across the school are committed to providing a range of external visits and opportunities to widen pupils' experience and their self-confidence. Pupils talked eloquently about how fell-walking had developed their resilience, such as overcoming a fear of heights. A high proportion of pupils take part in a diverse range of sporting activities, including football, cricket, golf and swimming. In addition, pupils access cultural activities, including dance, music lessons and a performance club. Leaders also widen pupils' horizons by developing their social skills through interaction with pupils from other schools, including joint sleepovers at school to develop pupils' social skills.
- Leaders have done much to enhance pupils' physical well-being and fitness. At breakfast clubs, pupils have regular opportunities to develop their skills and experience an active start to the day. Some pupils receive individual sessions to develop their sensory and motor skills. Leaders have revitalised outdoor spaces, with a series of resources and activities that provide added structure and purpose to outdoor play. The school has received a gold award in recognition of their innovative work in this area.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- further develop the roles of new phase leaders to heighten leadership capacity and their roles in raising pupils' progress
- build upon strategies to raise attendance so that recent improvements lead to sustained improvements for all pupils and groups of pupils
- improve the progress and the attainment of disadvantaged pupils by closely checking the effect of teaching and additional interventions.
- further develop strategies to improve the transition between the early years and key stage 1 to support better progress in reading, writing and mathematics
- develop subject expertise in mathematics across the school so that improvement strategies in mathematics gather the same momentum as those in reading and writing.

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

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Kirtley  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

**Information about the inspection**

As part of the inspection, I looked at the actions taken by leaders to improve pupils' progress at key stage 1 and key stage 2. I also looked at the progress made by children in the early years. I explored how leaders and teachers were addressing the needs of disadvantaged pupils. I also looked at the actions taken by leaders to improve attendance.

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher and middle leaders. I also spoke with three members of the governing body, including the chair. I held a meeting with a group of pupils and discussed pupils' learning with them in lessons. I also held a telephone conversation with the educational development partner from the local authority. I looked with you at learning in lessons and I also looked at pupils' work in books and folders. I examined school improvement priorities and looked at other documents, including the school's self-evaluation, behaviour and attendance records and assessment information. I examined safeguarding documents, including the single central record. I took into account 155 responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire and six parental free-text responses. I also took into account 199 responses to the pupil questionnaire and 17 responses to the staff questionnaire.