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Dear Mrs Douglas

Short inspection of Brookmead Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 November 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 January 2015.

Based on the evidence available during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In the 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.**

Since the previous inspection, you have worked hard to further improve provision for pupils in the early years and in key stage 1. As a result, pupils thrive and make consistently good progress, attaining standards that are well above the national average. However, leaders, at all levels, have not given sufficient attention to the need to improve provision in key stage 2. At the end of the previous inspection, leaders were asked to ensure that work was sufficiently challenging for all pupils. This area for improvement has not been fully addressed. Work for pupils in key stage 2 lacks suitable challenge across the range of subjects. Consequently, standards at the end of key stage 2 have fallen and pupils are not making sufficient progress.

Pupils say they enjoy coming to Brookmead. They enjoy their lessons, although older pupils said that, in most subjects, the work could be harder. Pupils love the range of extra-curricular activities that are available. They rate the clubs in tennis, multi-sports, art and American football as some of the best things about the school. Pupils correctly identify the friendliness of staff and pupils as another real strength of the school. They greatly appreciate the support of their adult mentors, who are always willing to listen and help.

Your vision of 'bringing learning to life and life to learning' provides a strong

rationale for the Brookmead curriculum. Your innovative use of new technology enriches the curriculum and makes it inclusive for all learners. One example of this is the use of special glasses which allow pupils to explore, in depth, the dome of St Paul's Cathedral before their trip to London to see the real building. This enabled a visually impaired pupil to see and appreciate the dome, which would otherwise have been inaccessible.

The exceptional strength of the pastoral support that is offered to Brookmead's pupils surpasses the school's vision. Parents were, rightly, effusive about the school's care for their children. Many parents were keen to share personal experiences of how you and your staff have gone 'above and beyond' to ensure that their children thrive at school. One parent said, 'The care and understanding they have with regard to the children are, without question, the best we have experienced.'

The dedicated work of the school's pastoral and inclusion teams ensures that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported by individually tailored programmes of support for both their emotional and academic needs. Consequently, this group of pupils is achieving well. Disadvantaged pupils are well supported through pastoral care. As a result, pupils say that they are happy at school, feel safe and are confident. However, disadvantaged pupils do not receive the same levels of support for their academic progress and current disadvantaged pupils in the school are not achieving as well as their peers.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school community is committed to keeping pupils safe. The culture of safeguarding is strong, and dedicated leaders ensure that pupils receive high levels of support. For example, records and emails show how concerns are raised and responded to at an early stage, with appropriate referral to external agencies for specialist support. Policies and procedures are embedded in the school's daily practice. All staff, including the designated safeguarding leads, are appropriately trained to be able to undertake work with children and keep them safe. As a result, staff are vigilant and know what to do in a range of situations.

Leaders have, correctly, identified concerns about the higher levels of pupils' absence last year. A detailed analysis was undertaken and appropriate intervention led to pupils attending school more regularly. As a result, attendance figures for this year are significantly higher.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Governors oversee the work of leaders and successfully provide challenge to make sure that the school is fully compliant with the current regulations and legislation. Systems and processes are effective and lead to a knowledgeable and vigilant staff.

Importantly, all pupils said that they feel safe at school. They are clear about the difference between arguments with each other and bullying, which they say rarely

happens. As one pupil said, 'Sometimes people are mean. It's not like proper bullying and we tell the teachers and they help.' If there were a problem with bullying, pupils believe that adults would take quick and effective action to address it. Pupils spoke confidently about how to keep themselves safe, especially when using technology, and shared strategies they have learned, such as using the highest privacy settings and never sharing passwords.

Inspection findings

- My first key line of enquiry focused on the impact of action taken by school leaders to improve standards in writing in key stage 2, particularly for the most able pupils and for disadvantaged pupils. This is because standards in writing have fallen below national averages. It is also because pupils' progress has been declining for several years and is now significantly well below the progress achieved by all pupils nationally. Together with school leaders, I observed lessons and looked at pupils' work in a range of books. I found that pupils are not given sufficient challenge to enable them to make good progress in writing. Books showed little evidence of meaningful assessment or of guidance to improve the standards of pupils' work. Teachers' expectations of all pupils, regardless of ability, are not high enough. This is because leaders have not provided clear guidance. As a result, current pupils in key stage 2 are not making good progress and too few pupils are achieving the higher standards.
- My second line of enquiry focused on the impact of action taken to improve the quality of teaching of mathematics in key stage 2, particularly for middle-prior-attaining pupils. This is because pupils' achievement is declining. Fewer pupils are making good progress and fewer pupils are attaining age-appropriate standards in mathematics at the end of key stage 2. Leaders have rightly identified teaching in mathematics in key stage 2 as an area for development. They have recently introduced new strategies for the teaching of mathematics and are confident that these will have a positive impact on pupils' learning. Middle-prior-attaining pupils are provided with an appropriate level of challenge and the work in their books is appropriate for their age. However, in lessons we observed, the most able pupils lacked sufficient challenge and a few were bored. This resulted in some minor disruption and lost learning time. The school's assessment information shows that pupils are not making good progress and, consequently, too few pupils are attaining the higher standards in mathematics.
- My third line of enquiry focused on whether pupils enjoy a broad and balanced curriculum which offers them opportunities to extend their learning and enable a greater proportion to achieve the higher standards. School leaders have given attentive consideration to the needs of all pupils in the design of the holistic and, in some subjects, innovative curriculum offered at Brookmead. You have ensured that pupils receive lessons across a wide range of subjects and, in some subjects, you have realised the vision of 'bringing learning to life and life to learning' in creative ways. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about the recent visit of a Roman centurion to the school; their stories about learning to be a gladiator prompted other pupils to gasp and ask, 'Will we get that too?' However, teaching in most subjects in key stage 2 lacks sufficient challenge for the majority of pupils. Where teaching is strongest, there are some good examples of cross-curricular writing

across a range of subjects and some evidence of deeper exploration of subjects. Where teaching is weaker, in key stage 2, tasks are too simple and inappropriate for the age group. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning across the range of subjects in key stage 2 does not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to extend their learning and make good progress. Too few pupils are achieving the higher standards.

- My fourth key line of enquiry focused on safeguarding. I describe how well pupils are kept safe, through a strong culture of safeguarding, in the paragraphs above.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leaders focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning in key stage 2 so that standards across all subjects rise rapidly
- they have a sharply focused action plan to raise standards in key stage 2 and that this is clearly communicated to all staff
- teachers have higher expectations of all pupils in key stage 2 so that greater proportions of pupils make the expected progress from key stage 1 to key stage 2 and greater proportions of pupils attain the higher standards.

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

Yours sincerely

Clare Morgan
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Together with a senior leader, I visited lessons in key stage 2. I spoke to pupils and examined work in their exercise books. I held meetings with senior leaders, including the headteacher and the senior leaders. I met with four members of the governing body. I took into account 103 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 53 written responses. I took into account 21 responses to the staff survey and 47 pupil responses. A range of documents was reviewed, including: the school's development plan; leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness; the school's single central record of recruitment checks made on staff; information about pupils' achievement; records of action taken to support pupils with a range of needs; records of attendance; and minutes of governing body meetings.