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Mrs Gill McKay  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs McKay

### **Short inspection of Brunton First School**

Following my visit to the school on 11 July 2019, 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 November 2015.

### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained and improved upon the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and the governors have carefully steered the school through a period of expansion, while ensuring that standards of attainment have remained high and the quality of teaching is strong. From September, the school will reach its maximum capacity. In preparation for this, you have thoughtfully built up a suitable leadership structure and invested in developing the skills of your middle leaders. Consequently, leadership is now devolved and distributed effectively across the school. It also ensures you are well placed to sustain high-quality education going forwards. Leaders at all levels are clear about their roles and responsibilities. There is a strong team ethos and a shared sense of commitment. The community clearly values the school highly. Almost all the parents who responded to Parent View would recommend the school. One parent, whose comments reflected those of many, said, 'This school has grown rapidly since it opened in 2009. However, the school still manages to create an environment where the needs of each and every child are thought about and considered carefully.'

An area for improvement, identified in the school's last inspection, asked you to make sure all groups of pupils made substantial and sustained progress. Since then, you have developed your assessment systems so that you can check, in detail, the progress being made by different groups. The governors now check this data across the year and hold leaders fully to account. As a result, differences in the rate of progress being made by boys and girls are reducing but have not been eliminated.

You also know there is some variability in rates of progress in subjects, with fewer pupils making the progress they should in writing.

You were also asked to improve the effectiveness of the curriculum. I found that you place high importance on ensuring that all your pupils become fluent readers. This is clear from your school development plan and the from the well-structured teaching of early reading skills. Overall, by the end of key stage 1 pupils attain well-above-average standards in reading. Pupils are also attaining well in mathematics. Here too, I found you have developed a thoughtfully structured approach, which is used consistently across the school to challenge pupils' thinking. However, your assessment information shows fewer pupils than should be expected are attaining the higher standard in writing. Scrutiny of the work in books shows this is because some pupils make too many technical errors in their spelling, punctuation and grammar. I also found the standard of pupils' handwriting to be very variable. Some pupils do not form letters correctly and, in some cases, this affects the speed and fluency with which they can write.

This year, you have reviewed your wider curriculum and worked hard on planning more-demanding content in subjects such as history and geography. The plans your staff have prepared are well-considered. They set out the knowledge to be taught and the skills to be practised and mastered as pupils progress through the school. Teachers are excited about implementing these plans from September. They told me they feel they are 'raising the bar' and that the new topics they will teach will capture pupils' imagination more than ever before.

I found the work you do to prepare pupils as young citizens to be a strength of the school. Pupils behave extremely well. They are polite, courteous and particularly mature for their age. During my visit, 'Hip-Hop and Healthy' events were taking place. Pupils were running a daily mile, being trained in gymnastics and were learning about nutrition. You have engaged external sports coaches to deliver good-quality training sessions, which complement the wide range of after-school sports clubs you offer. Pupils were keen to tell me about the skipping festival they recently took part in. Boys and girls played football together at playtime. We also observed teachers working with pupils on strategies to support good mental health. For example, they sensitively managed a peer massage session in a Year 1 lesson. In my discussions with pupils, I found they have a good awareness of different faiths and cultures. Some have visited a Sikh temple this year. Others have taken part in Jewish cultural activities, helping them to understand their purpose and significance. As a school, you have charted all the different faiths and cultures covered by your pupil population. Plotting everyone's country of origin on a world map has helped pupils to understand the variety of cultures globally.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Thorough checks are made on all adults who work in or visit the school. Your policies and procedures are up to date, as is the training you provide. However, you told me that a few employees had missed some training and that this

gap was still to be addressed. You provide weekly briefings to keep your staff informed of the needs of any pupil who may be more vulnerable. As many children are brought to school or to the adjacent private nursery by car, your newsletters to parents also include frequent reminders about the safe use of the car park when dropping off and collecting children.

Fortunately, you have very rarely been required to act to protect a child. Indeed, you have not needed to make any child protection referrals to social services since the last inspection. Nevertheless, you ensure safeguarding has a high priority, that your staff remain vigilant and that they know that 'It could happen here.'

Pupils know what bullying is and the different forms it can take. They explained to me why someone might become a bully and what they should do if they felt they were being bullied. They also assured me that bullying is very rare in school and, if it were to happen, the staff would address it immediately.

### **Inspection findings**

- In this inspection, I looked closely at the standards being attained by children and pupils currently in the school. Children enter the Reception Year with skills that are broadly typical for their age, although some have more highly developed speech and language skills. As most children are socially and emotionally ready to learn, and the teaching is strong, they make rapid progress. By the end of the Reception Year, the proportion of children who attain a good level of development is well above that seen nationally. Indeed, around a third of children exceed the early learning goal in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Children are therefore well prepared and ready to start Year 1. By the end of Year 2, over 90% of pupils attain the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics. The most able pupils make the progress they should in reading and mathematics, with over a third attaining the higher standard at the end of key stage 1. However, some do not make the progress they should in writing. As was the case at the time of the last inspection, girls make better progress than boys, although there are signs that this difference is reducing. Pupils continue to make strong progress in key stage 2. By the end of Year 4, assessment information and the work in pupils' books shows pupils are catching up and addressing some of their weaknesses in writing.
- I also looked at why outcomes in reading had been well above average in recent years. I found that your early years leader has done an excellent job of developing a consistent approach to the teaching of phonics. All pupils are taught to link sounds and letters from the start of the Reception Year. Children's grasp of phonics progresses quickly because the teaching is lively, engaging and fun. Teachers ensure that children repeat new sounds frequently, helping them to remember the sounds letters make. As a result, almost all pupils attain the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check. Pupils are provided with suitable books, both in school and at home, to foster their love of reading. A new approach has been introduced this year in which all the class read the same text together. This is helping pupils to better understand the author's intentions and to strengthen their comprehension skills. These well-planned approaches are

ensuring that many of your pupils become avid readers.

- I also wanted to see how well your curriculum was supporting pupils' personal development. Your personal, social, and health education (PSHE) programme prepares pupils very well for life in modern Britain. In the visits we made to classrooms, we observed skilful teaching and high-quality discussion about the adverse effect of gender and disability stereotyping. In their discussions, pupils also considered different types of relationships, such as families with two mums or two dads. It was clear that you actively foster pupils' awareness of protected characteristics, in line with the requirements of the Equality Act. The work in PSHE books from across the year showed me similarly careful work has been done to ensure that pupils have a good understanding of democracy and the legal system. You also listen carefully to the views of your pupils. The 'Voices of Brunton' group of pupils have worked successfully to develop a code of conduct, for example. All these approaches are ensuring that your provision for pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The governors provide strong strategic oversight of the school. Finances are managed carefully. They ensure, for example, that the few disadvantaged pupils in the school receive extra help and achieve similar outcomes to other pupils. They also ensure the primary sports premium is used to provide a rich diet of activities. The governors also play an active role in developing the school's plans for improvement. Their visits into school are designed to check on the difference planned actions are making. Their frequent visits ensure they are well informed and knowledgeable about how well the school is performing.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils check and improve the technical accuracy of their writing, so that more go on to attain the higher standard in writing by the end of key stage 1
- pupils form their letters correctly and develop a good standard of handwriting
- they continue to reduce differences in attainment and progress between boys and girls, especially in reading and writing
- catch-up sessions are always provided quickly for any members of staff who are unavailable for safeguarding training.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**  
**Information about the inspection**

During this one-day inspection, I met with you and members of your senior leadership team, the early years leader, subject leaders and teachers. I also met with three members of the governing body, including the chair and vice-chair. I talked to a group of pupils and listened to some Year 1 pupils read. Together, you and I visited most classes to look at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. During lesson visits, I checked some pupils' books and talked to some pupils about their learning and progress. A group of subject leaders and I looked in detail at some pupils' books. The sample of books selected covered children's and pupils' work in different subjects across the Reception and key stages 1 and 2. I looked at the 137 responses to Parent View. I also took account of the 17 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the 385 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey. I scrutinised a range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation of its effectiveness and its improvement planning, policies, assessment information and attendance data. I also checked other documents available on the school website. I focused particularly on the progress of children and pupils currently in the school and the quality of the school's approach to teaching reading. I also considered the breadth and balance of the curriculum, the work of governors and the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.