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Mr Michael Rodgers
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Dear Mr Rodgers

Short inspection of Brookside Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 23 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 October 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You are reflective and dynamic. You recognise where you need to strengthen the school's quality of education and you devise effective plans to secure continuously improving progress for pupils. You take action promptly and ensure that your staff implement the strategies with consistency. Along with governors and other leaders, you are ambitious to ensure that there are constantly high standards across the school.

You and your staff have created a welcoming school that you maintain to a high standard. You are constantly finding ways to enhance the environment for pupils and staff alike. For example, you have invested in an all-weather football pitch so that pupils have access to a good quality playing surface at any time of year. You have developed an outdoor learning area as a stimulus for pupils to improve their writing skills. You have also provided staff with a quiet room that they may use for their planning, preparation and assessment.

You have successfully addressed the areas for improvement which were identified in the previous inspection report.

You have improved the progress of all groups of pupils, particularly in reading in key stage 1. The vast majority of current pupils across the school make strong progress

in reading, writing and mathematics. In key stage 1 in particular, you have ensured that teachers assess pupils more thoroughly when they begin Year 1. They then provide extra support for pupils, depending on the needs they identify.

You have taken deliberate action to create a more structured approach to the teaching of reading, including in key stage 1. Strategies include daily reading sessions, both for individuals and for groups. You now give more opportunities for pupils to use their inference skills. You and your staff have devised your own questioning techniques, so that pupils become accustomed to exploring the books they are reading more thoroughly and deepening their understanding of them.

You have also brought about improvement in writing since the last inspection. Evidence from the school's assessment information and from pupils' books shows that current pupils make strong progress. Teachers now tackle misconceptions about grammar and spelling more consistently, which has contributed effectively to the progress that pupils make. Pupils in Year 1, for example, develop the ability to write with a considerable level of complexity for their age. The most able progress to constructing sentences such as, 'I'm so comfy and warm because it is so soft,' when writing in the character of a cat finding a place to sleep. They show that they know how to engage the reader and write with more sophisticated sentence structures.

Almost all current pupils make considerable progress in reading, writing and mathematics. However, the proportion of pupils who achieve higher standards is typically below average, using the most recent national figures for key stage 1 and key stage 2 for comparison.

Members of staff with whom I spoke said they appreciate the training that you provide for them. You plan it carefully so that it supports the targets you set as part of the management of their performance. It also relates closely to the school's own priorities. Staff find the training helpful in improving their skills, which is consistent with the effective teaching and learning that is evident in school. They also acknowledge that you do all you can to manage their workload. For instance, you have introduced less time-consuming ways of tracking pupils' progress.

Pupils' absence rate has recently reduced and is now fractionally below the national average. You have also reduced pupils' persistent absence. You have done this by using strategies such as presenting awards in school to high attenders and sending letters of concern to parents of frequent absentees. However, you accept that the rate of persistent absence is still too high, being currently above the national average.

The local authority has a clear understanding of the strengths of the school and areas for development. It provides effective support, while recognising the capability and effectiveness of senior leaders.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. The designated safeguarding lead acts promptly when adults report concerns about pupils to her. When required, she makes referrals to appropriate agencies, such as children's services, in a timely way. The school's record of required checks on members of staff is comprehensive and complies with statutory guidance.

The culture of safeguarding in the school is strong. Your staff are knowledgeable about safeguarding processes because they regularly receive appropriate training. They understand the various signs of abuse and the need to be vigilant. They also have a deep understanding of pupils and their needs, enabling them to be alert to unusual patterns of behaviour that may indicate a concern. Pupils feel safe in school and say that bullying of any kind is rare. Adults are caring and give pupils helpful information, including how to stay safe when using the internet.

Governors have a clear overview of safeguarding procedures. They receive regular reports from senior leaders and check on the effectiveness of safeguarding processes during their regular visits to school.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the day, we agreed a number of key lines of enquiry, which I followed during the inspection.
- One key line of enquiry concerned the dip in achievement in reading in the Year 6 test in 2017. You analysed the results in detail and concluded that pupils' inference skills had not been as sharp as they needed to be. You put effective actions in place to address this and to make sure that pupils become strong in a range of skills. To this end, there is now a greater focus on developing a variety of reading skills, such as predicting, clarifying and summarising. You have familiarised pupils with the language they need to ask and answer questions about their reading. Staff ensure that they demonstrate an effective approach to this. They share their thinking with pupils as they respond to questions that require deeper thought about the text that pupils are reading. You have also given greater prominence to developing pupils' oral skills, to improve their ability to communicate in connection with their reading development. For example, teachers now expect all pupils from an early age to respond in full sentences to any questions they ask. Evidence from pupils' work and the school's assessment information shows that current pupils make strong progress, with typically high proportions working at the expected standard. However, you acknowledge that not enough pupils reach the higher standard.
- My next focus for the inspection was the progress of current children in the early years. Children enter the early years provision with skills and knowledge that are below those that are typical for their age and stage of development. Many pupils have particular emotional needs and slow language development. Evidence from children's work and from a range of assessment information shows that children

make strong progress from their starting points. In writing, for instance, children progress from barely decipherable marks on the page to neatly written, simple sentences. Most-able children write relatively complex sentences, given their age. The early years lead is highly capable and constantly analyses the needs of the children, providing appropriate support as required. For example, she has identified that current boys need extra support to develop their writing. Following their interests as closely as possible, she has set up a 'dinosaur world' to encourage them to write for a purpose. She has also ensured that there are plenty of opportunities for children to develop their physical skills. This strategy contributes effectively to the strong progress that children make in writing, for instance, since it helps them to develop better control of their writing tools.

- My next key line of enquiry related to the progress that current pupils who are disadvantaged make in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' work and the school's assessment information show that pupils benefit from the recently introduced strategies to strengthen reading achievement. They also make considerable progress in writing and mathematics. For example, in mathematics in Year 5, pupils of middle-ability progress strongly, moving from completing calculations involving rounding numbers at the beginning of the year to accurately representing data in line graphs. Leaders use the pupil premium funding effectively, providing this group of pupils with a range of support activities. These include individual tuition or extra sessions with small groups of pupils in English and mathematics. The money also helps to fund a learning mentor, part of whose role is to provide support for disadvantaged pupils' emotional and mental health needs. Typically, high proportions of pupils reach the expected standard for their year group in reading, writing and mathematics. However, you are aware that the proportion of pupils who reach the highest standards is typically below the national average.
- Finally, leaders understand their statutory responsibilities well. Governors have a thorough knowledge of the school and fully understand its priorities. They challenge and support senior leaders effectively, asking suitably searching questions to hold them to account. Leaders have ensured that the website is now up to date and complies with government requirements.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue with their current strategies to strengthen further pupils' progress in reading
- they develop effective strategies to increase the number of pupils who achieve the highest standards in reading, writing and mathematics across the school, including those who are disadvantaged
- they persevere with their work to reduce persistent absence, so that it is close to or below the national average.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools

commissioner and the director of children's services for Cheshire West and Chester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mark Quinn
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

With you, I carried out short visits to the early years and a range of classes in key stage 1 and key stage 2. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation summary, action plans for school improvement, minutes of meetings of the governing body and records related to the safeguarding of children. I held discussions with you, other members of staff, governors and pupils. I held a discussion on the telephone with a representative of the local authority. I analysed pupils' work and the school's own assessment information. There were no responses to any of the online surveys.