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Mrs Joanne Mappin  
Headteacher  
Gilbert Heathcote Nursery and Infant School  
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Derbyshire  
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Dear Mrs Mappin

### **Short inspection of Gilbert Heathcote Nursery and Infant School**

Following my visit to the school on 20 January 2016, 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 2010.

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

You have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, the staff and the governing body have embraced change and development over the last few years. You evaluate the work of the school diligently. You use your conclusions well to identify pertinent priorities for improvement and then set about the tasks systematically. The recent drop in the achievement of the pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2015 is untypical. Your analysis has enabled you to identify the nature of the problem and you have taken action to tackle it.

You have tackled the areas for improvement from the previous inspection well. You overhauled the provision in the early years. You have ensured that good attention is paid now to promoting reading and writing, and with some success. Equally, the pupils now regard the use of computers as part and parcel of their learning. For example, they were able to tell me about how using computers had helped them to improve their phonics skills. One of them said, 'It gives you a picture in your mind to help you work out difficult words.'

You scrutinise in some detail a wide range of information about how well pupils are doing. You consider carefully what the information means and reach some astute conclusions. For example, you have identified correctly that weaknesses in boys' writing in the early years is getting in the way of them reaching a good level of development by the time they begin Key Stage 1.

Both parents and pupils, understandably, express very positive views about the school. Pupils demonstrate good attitudes to learning. Their social and academic progress is fostered equally well. One parent summed this up for me, writing, 'Both my children have flourished since starting Gilbert's, not only in their education, but also socially,' a sentiment echoed in all of the other conversations that I was able to have with parents.

Interesting tasks and topics get pupils' attention in lessons, so that pupils concentrate on their work. Pupils behave well and interruptions to lessons are rare, minor and dealt with effectively – sometimes, as they told me convincingly, by pupils themselves.

You have ensured that there is a good focus on meeting the needs of disadvantaged pupils, beginning in the early years. The teachers look carefully at how well those pupils are doing and identify things that are inhibiting them from doing better. They plan thoroughly, specifically for the needs of those pupils. As a result, lessons and other learning opportunities are designed carefully to meet those pupils' particular and individual needs, and this continues into Key Stage 1. For example, the 'Meerkats' room provides good support for the social and emotional development of pupils who use it. Other initiatives, such as 'Bring an adult to school' (BATS) day and the more regular BATS club, are helping parents to make a stronger contribution to their children's learning and were picked out as helpful by parents in conversations with me.

Your actions mean that disadvantaged pupils are catching up with their peers, but not consistently in all aspects. The achievement of these pupils is not yet at the same level as their peers', particularly for those disadvantaged pupils who are among the most able.

The governing body is well organised and very active. It has developed a number of effective and systematic ways of carrying out its duties. As a result, it is well informed about what is happening at the school and increasingly able to ask challenging questions, for example about the ways in which you use additional funding for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders and managers at the school are very aware of those questions. Their keenness to be able to answer them satisfactorily means that the governing body is having an influence on the work of the school.

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

The school's policies and practices for safeguarding pupils are fit for purpose. You give a high priority to safeguarding. You hold frequent discussions among the staff to make sure that any concerns are identified quickly and acted on promptly. You have made sure that the ability to deal with any concerns is not dependent on a single person.

The staff understand and use the school's straightforward procedure for reporting any concerns that they have. The staff do not consider what may appear to be small things to be unimportant and so are always prepared to raise a concern quickly. You work well with local agencies to get whatever support you consider necessary to help a child. You are very prepared to pursue any matters vigorously.

You described yourself to me as 'getting grumpy' with parents to make sure that pupils attend school regularly. You are justified in so doing: attendance has improved well in the last two years and, in particular, there has been no persistent absence at the school since 2013. This success is an important contribution to the welfare of pupils, as much so as the things that pupils learn about how to keep themselves safe. Pupils demonstrated to me good reasoning about where and when it is safe and not safe to cross roads, and knowledge about internet safety.

As a result of your efforts, pupils feel safe at the school and those parents whose views were available during the inspection are very pleased with this aspect of the school's work. One pupil summarised what many were telling me, saying 'I know that everybody's here for me.'

## **Inspection findings**

- You have communicated to the staff very effectively your determination to keep the school improving.
- You have worked systematically over the years since the previous inspection to bring about a range of improvements.
- The carefully structured approach to developing children's writing in the early years results in them being able increasingly to write without, for example, having to trace over letters.
- The proportion of pupils achieving a good level of development by the end of the early years has increased. You have, nevertheless, identified accurately barriers preventing some boys in particular from reaching that level.
- You have laid good foundations for encouraging pupils to read. Those foundations ensure that pupils develop positive attitudes to reading, including among boys. In conversations with me, boys demonstrated just as much interest in reading as did girls.

- You have made sure that a good range of books is available to pupils throughout the school, including books that they can take home. The range includes books that help pupils to learn about social diversity.
- Some of the parents with whom I spoke picked out reading and spelling as areas in which they have seen their children make particularly good progress.
- You have developed a coherent approach to teaching phonics. The teachers make effective use of that approach throughout the school. As a result, the pupils are able to build up and, increasingly, to apply their learning in a range of subjects.
- The pupils' phonics scores have improved and the school is now much closer to the national average. That is due in no small part to the considerable success that the teachers have had in improving the phonics skills of disadvantaged pupils, who have now reached almost the same level in the screening test as other pupils at the school. One parent with whom I spoke was particularly pleased, describing her child as having 'come on in leaps and bounds' at the school, 'particularly phonics'
- The teaching enables pupils to make good progress. The teachers make pupils think for themselves and do not easily give them the answers when pupils find something difficult.
- For example, pupils are routinely expected to apply their knowledge of phonics when learning about all of the subjects in the curriculum. As a result, they are ready and willing and make reasonable attempts to read words with which they are unfamiliar, or that they find difficult, even if not always successfully, as when one pupil struggled with the word 'Majesty's' on my identity badge; he didn't quite manage it, but had a good go before asking for help.
- You use a range of different ways to meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils, both in lessons and through extra sessions.
- The governing body collects a broad and useful range of information about the school, including obtaining the views of the local authority. It scrutinises the information thoroughly and so is able to hold leaders and managers to account for their work effectively.
- Leaders, managers and members of the governing body are able to discuss the achievement of different groups of pupils represented at the school in some detail. They are able, as a result, to identify astutely those aspects of pupils' achievement that need to be improved.
- The governing body was involved closely in analysing the drop in pupils' achievement at the end of the Key Stage 1 in 2015, including for different groups, such as disadvantaged pupils. It is able to account for the particular difficulties experienced at the school that led to those results, and to ascertain that you are taking appropriate action to deal with the matter.
- Well-planned activities enable pupils to develop a sense of British values. For example, writing that they produced on a theme of 'Our values and life in modern Britain' showed how they reflected on the importance of being kind and helpful to others, and that they are starting to acquire an understanding of democratic values through elections for the school council.

- Your efforts to help pupils to become aware of social diversity begins in the early years. In addition to things such as a carefully chosen selection of books, activities such as 'Aliens have patterned pants' helped the children to think about, to recognise and to value differences.

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

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the differences remaining between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and others are eradicated, particularly for most-able pupils
- the proportion of boys reaching a good level of development by the end of the early years is increased, particularly by tackling the difficulties that they experience with 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 Derbyshire local authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Clive Moss

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I held meetings with the headteacher, representatives of the governing body, the designated person responsible for safeguarding, other members of staff, and a representative of the local authority. I made a series of visits to lessons jointly with the headteacher, spending time in all classrooms at different times of the day. I examined examples of pupils' work and looked at the teachers' assessments of that work. I held a range of discussions with a wide variety of pupils, informally when observing breaktimes and during lessons, and formally with a group of pupils. I observed pupils' behaviour around the school at the start of the day, at breaktimes and during lessons. I met with parents at the beginning of the school day, looked at the views of parents posted on Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and a letter to me written by a parent. I examined a range of documents, including safeguarding records and policies, behaviour policies, the latest achievement information for the school (the school's data, the school's self-evaluation and its improvement plan), and records of meetings held by the governing body. I looked at questionnaires completed and returned by members of staff.