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Mrs Jacqueline Egan  
Headteacher  
Icknield Infant and Nursery School  
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Dear Mrs Egan

### **Short inspection of Icknield Infant and Nursery School**

Following my visit to the school on 14 June 2017, 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 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 determined to provide pupils with a high-quality education and this commitment has ensured a clear focus on continual improvement throughout the school.

You are a respected and knowledgeable leader. With the effective support of your senior leadership team, you have built a skilled and dedicated staff team who work successfully alongside each other and do all that they can to support and look after the pupils in their care. Since the previous inspection, you and governors have managed a significant change in teaching staff. Through the school's robust induction procedures, you have worked hard to ensure that teachers joining the school settle quickly and that the school's good standards of teaching are maintained. Morale among the staff team is high and staff members' responses to the inspection survey were universally positive.

Children start well at Icknield Infant and Nursery School. You provide a stimulating and caring environment so that individual needs are met well and children quickly grow in confidence. The fully-resourced, well-planned outside environment ensures that children are given many opportunities to develop their early reading and writing skills in a purposeful way. During their time in the early years, children make good progress from their starting points and the number achieving a good level of development is increasing. One parent commented: 'All staff are happy, friendly and

caring. The activities are well planned and are very imaginative. Our daughter has amazed us with all that she has learned over such a short period of time.' Likewise, pupils in the infant school, including the most able pupils, continue to be well supported in their learning and consequently make good progress. They are effectively prepared for the next stage of their education.

Parents recognise the good work you do for their children and appreciate the many opportunities you provide for them to come into school. One parent summarised the responses, saying: 'We have been incredibly impressed with the way both our children have been taught and nurtured at this school. They are incredibly inclusive of parents, helping us understand how to teach our children at home and sharing what they've learned.'

Governors know the school well and are clear about its strengths and areas for improvement. They support and challenge you appropriately to ensure that pupils receive a good education. Governors are well informed and visit the school regularly. You and governors have maintained and developed the strengths identified in the previous inspection report and made good progress towards achieving successful improvements.

One area for improvement identified at the previous inspection was to make sure teaching assistants are deployed well by the school. You ensure that teaching assistants receive appropriate training and professional support to improve their practice. As a result, teaching assistants show a good level of skill that they apply effectively to support pupils to do the best that they can. During the inspection, teaching assistants were seen teaching phonics lessons to small groups of children and providing support for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, teaching assistants' work now contributes effectively to the increasing progress that pupils make.

At the time of the previous inspection, you were also asked to develop the effectiveness of middle leaders. You and the governors have involved all leaders in developing robust methods for ensuring consistency and quality in teaching and learning. Regular checks are made through observations in classes and looking at pupils' work. This ensures strengths are shared and any weaknesses addressed. Less experienced middle leaders quickly develop their confidence and skills through the support, direction and professional development provided by more experienced colleagues. Consequently, this has strengthened the capacity of all leaders to address the needs of individual pupils more effectively and is improving outcomes for all pupils.

You and the governors recognise that there are still areas to develop to move the school forward and you acknowledge that improving pupils' attendance is a key priority.

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Robust systems are in place for the recruitment of new staff. Staff are regularly trained and know how to communicate any concerns. Governors regularly check the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures and undertake their own training. Records of action are detailed and of high quality. You use the services of the local authority to assess the quality of your safeguarding systems and ensure your procedures meet all the necessary requirements.

You have created a positive culture for safeguarding and pupils said that they feel happy and settled in school. They told me that they feel proud of their school and they know how to keep safe, for example, when using the internet. Pupils also said that bullying is rare and that the adults quickly sort out any problems. Pupils behave very well in lessons, and around the school. Pupils told me, 'We treat each other nicely and look after each other.'

The parents who responded to Parent View strongly agreed that their children are happy and safe in school. They commented that Icknield Infant and Nursery is a 'great, caring school', and that 'the teachers care about the children a lot'.

## **Inspection findings**

- In order to check that the school remains good, one of the key lines of enquiry I explored was how effectively leaders are improving the quality of teaching across the school and, consequently, the achievement of pupils. This was because in 2016, pupils' outcomes at the end of key stage 1 were below the national average in reading, writing and mathematics.
- You and your leadership team lost no time in addressing these lower outcomes. You introduced a robust assessment system so that leaders are better able to identify gaps in learning and where pupils make the best progress, or where progress is slower. This enables you to put focused and effective support in place for the pupils who need it. Leaders have successfully introduced a new method of teaching writing, based upon a number of recognised strategies. The school's assessment information demonstrates that this is raising standards in writing across the school.
- When I scrutinised the work of current Year 2 pupils with the leadership team, it was clear that pupils are now making improved progress in their reading, writing and mathematics. The school's own assessments indicate that standards are now in line with the national average for reading and mathematics, and above in writing.
- The second line of enquiry focused on how effectively phonics is taught, and if pupils make good enough progress in this area, from their starting points. The published data shows that although there is an upward trend, the proportion of pupils that reached the expected level in the Year 1 phonics check has been below the national average for the last three years.
- Leaders have rightly taken effective action to tackle the previous weaknesses in

phonics teaching. You have trained staff to deliver a well-planned and structured approach across the school. Pupils' progress is closely tracked and targeted support put in place for any underachievement in order to improve pupils' outcomes. Pupils who read their books to me clearly enjoy reading and use their knowledge of phonics effectively to help them work out unfamiliar words. Teachers provide pupils with many opportunities to practise and develop these skills further. As a result, school assessment information indicates that children's attainment in phonics has improved and is now in line with national figures.

- Another area I checked was whether disadvantaged pupils who are currently at the school are making good progress in a reading, writing and mathematics. The reason for looking at this area was that the results of the key stage 1 national assessments in 2016 showed that disadvantaged pupils at Icknield Infant and Nursery achieved less well than other pupils nationally.
- Leaders, including governors, view the achievement and well-being of disadvantaged pupils in the school as a high priority. Training from the local authority has enabled leaders, including governors, to ensure that the additional pupil premium funding provided by the government is being spent effectively. Leaders use the funding to organise extra help in lessons to support disadvantaged pupils to progress more quickly. You also ensure that disadvantaged pupils access enrichment activities such as trips, visits and clubs to broaden their experiences and build their self-esteem.
- The progress that disadvantaged pupils make is tracked very closely and monitored regularly so that any gaps in learning are swiftly addressed. Your inclusion coordinator and family worker both liaise effectively with external agencies to provide practical support and point families to further help available in the local community.
- The school's current assessment information shows that your proactive and comprehensive approach ensures that disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, make good progress throughout the school and now sometimes they outperform others in the school, and nationally.
- Finally, I considered how well pupils are supported and encouraged to attend school. This line of enquiry arose from historical information showing that not all pupils attended school as often as they should. I looked at rates of attendance and, specifically, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Previously, these groups have had particularly high rates of absence, including persistent absence.
- Leaders are aware of the need to improve attendance and rigorous procedures are in place to establish the reasons for any pupil's absence. You take actions to address attendance issues; for example, staff phoning parents at the start of the day when pupils do not turn up for school.
- Your focused actions are having a positive impact and the attendance figures for the school, and particularly for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are all improving. Still, there are a number of pupils who, for various and sometimes complex reasons, are regularly absent. Pupils' attendance remains a school improvement priority.

## **Next steps for the school**

- Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:
  - the recent work on improving the attendance of pupils is further developed so that the school's attendance figures are at least in line with national averages
  - the number of pupils who fail to attend the school regularly continues to reduce.

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

Yours sincerely

Fiona Webb  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

- Meetings were held with you, other members of the senior leadership team, middle leaders and the chair of the governing body, where we discussed the key lines of enquiry for this inspection, the school's internal evaluation of its performance, plans for future improvement, and information about current pupils' attendance, progress and attainment.
- A range of evidence was gathered to judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This included observations of teaching and learning, jointly with the senior leadership team in some classes, and sampling of pupils' current work across all subjects and across a wide range of abilities.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey to take into consideration. However, I spoke informally to a number of pupils in classrooms about their learning, and met more formally with a group of pupils to talk about their school experience.
- Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined, including mandatory checks made during the recruitment of new staff, and case studies about referrals made to external agencies. A discussion was held with you as the school's designated safeguarding lead.
- I also spoke with the local authority improvement adviser on the telephone.
- The views of 37 parents who responded to Parent View were taken into account, as well as the 33 responses that parents made using the free-text service.
- The 16 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey were also considered to obtain staff views.