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Dear Mrs Lamb

Short inspection of Gilthill Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 27 February 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 February 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 have sustained Gilthill Primary as a happy, welcoming school. Pupils whom I met during my visit say that, other than some minor, occasional teasing between them, there is no bullying or unkindness, because everyone gets on so well together. Classrooms are engaging, busy places where pupils pay attention and work hard. I saw children in the Reception class learning together the sound that 'sh' makes by, for example, playing with skittles which had words on such, as 'fish' and 'ship', which they were reading confidently. Meanwhile, pupils in Year 1 were practising their writing. As part of their topic on the polar regions, they were explaining how a penguin could find its way home. Pupils were writing imaginative answers such as, 'He could get on a speedboat and go to Antarctica.'

The curriculum is interesting and varied, and pupils say they enjoy learning. For instance, pupils in Year 3 find out about the Amazon rainforest and the Mayan civilization, while pupils in Year 5 study Stone Age Britain. As a result of lessons that are engaging, pupils like to come to school. Attendance is consistently above the national average, while the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is much lower than found typically in other primary schools. Your staff enhance the curriculum with a range of extra-curricular activities, with a strong emphasis on competitive sport. Details of pupils' success in, for example, cross-country events are celebrated in your school newsletter, and team photographs are proudly displayed near the school entrance.

You and your staff have the strong support of parents and carers. Ninety-seven per cent of those who responded to Parent View would recommend Gilthill to others. A very large majority stated that their child makes good progress because of being taught well. As one parent explained, 'The school gives all the children opportunities to achieve to their full potential. Children are happy and polite. Staff are always happy to listen to parents and will readily take on board our comments.'

You have attended well to most of the areas that inspectors identified as needing improvement from the last inspection. The proportions of pupils who reach a higher level of understanding at the end of key stage 2 is now considerably above the national average. For example, last year, four in 10 attained this standard in reading and over half in mathematics. The proportions of pupils who attain a greater depth of understanding in key stage 1, though not yet above the national average, is also increasing due to better teaching. Pupils explained to me that teachers consistently explain to them the purpose of their learning, and give them many opportunities to undertake mathematical problems that relate to real life. Teachers also plan for pupils to write at length in subjects across the curriculum. For instance, as part of their history work, pupils in Year 5 wrote explanations of how the Battle of Britain was won.

You agree that, despite being an area for improvement at the last inspection, leaders did not address weaknesses in phonics teaching sufficiently quickly. Year-on-year, lower proportions than the national average have continued to reach the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check. Several approaches have been trialled in successive years, but none of these proved effective enough in significantly increasing the proportion reaching this standard. However, this academic year, you have ensured that teaching of phonics has been of a much better quality. Teachers place pupils in appropriate groups that allow them to make faster progress. Those who need to catch up are taught well the sounds they do not as yet know. As a result, a considerably higher proportion of the current Year 1 pupils are currently on track to reach the expected standard in the screening check this year. In addition, pupils are catching up faster. Nine out of the 10 pupils who did not pass in the summer term 2017 did so by Christmas. However, teachers are still giving the weakest readers books to read that are too hard for them.

Your school development plan contains the correct priorities for improvement, and you are undertaking sensible actions to bring these about. However, you agree that the plan is too vague. Members of the governing body also told me that the plan's lack of detail makes it difficult for them to see what is happening and to check effectively whether the actions are having the effect you intend. As a result, they cannot hold you to account as robustly as they could. You are working with colleagues in your family of schools to find a better format for an improvement plan that will meet leaders' needs well, but have not yet arrived at a solution.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Case files that I examined during my visit were clear and show you are unafraid to make brisk

referrals to a wide range of external agencies, if this is necessary to support or to protect a vulnerable child. Staff have effective training in safeguarding, along with the opportunities to ask questions to ensure that they understand. They fully understand their primary duty to do all they can to protect a pupil about whom they are concerned and know the school's procedure to do this.

Pupils I met were very keen to tell me that they, their siblings, and both older and younger peers, feel safe in school. Pupils are taught well about risks, such as using physical education (PE) and playground equipment safely, about strangers and about road safety, as well as who to approach if they ever feel unsafe.

Inspection findings

- During my visit, I explored what led to the sudden rise in both progress and attainment in Year 6 in 2017, and whether this was reflected in other year groups. I also examined what action leaders and staff were taking in key stage 1 to accelerate pupils' progress, particularly in respect of phonics. In addition, I examined the school's policy and procedures for exclusion.
- Pupils leave Year 6 well prepared for secondary school. This is because teaching across key stage 2 has improved. For example, teachers ensure that pupils have very good comprehension skills. They give pupils very clear guidance on how to respond to texts. As a result, pupils explain precisely in writing not only information that is explicit within what they read, but also things that are inferred within the text. In mathematics, teachers in key stage 2 successfully enable pupils to confidently solve problems and to explain their reasoning.
- You explained that results in key stage 1 were not high enough last year because, for example, pupils lacked the stamina necessary to complete extended comprehension tasks. In writing, you felt pupils needed better guidance on how to improve and edit their writing. In addition, pupils' spelling and handwriting skills were not sufficiently high. Pupils also lacked the mathematical ability to use number well enough when in conjunction with elements, such as money or measurement.
- You have attended well to all of these areas. The large number of exercise books I scrutinised during my visit shows convincingly that pupils in key stage 1, and in key stage 2, are being given extensive guidance to edit their work. Pupils have very regular spelling and handwriting practice, and there is strong evidence of increasing amounts of mathematical reasoning and problem-solving across different year groups. Exercise books also show that pupils' comprehension skills have now improved. Pupils in Year 3 who did not attain the expected levels are being given good support to catch up.
- School data reflects pupils' good achievement. As a result, seven in 10 pupils are currently on track to reach the expectations for their age across almost all year groups and subjects.
- A higher proportion than the national average reaches the expected standard in the national phonics screening check by the time they leave key stage 1. However, teachers do not give the weakest readers books that are appropriate

for them. Pupils find these books too difficult. They have to try guess too many words by looking at the pictures for clues, or by attempting to use the context of the sentence. As a result, they do not develop sufficient confidence in their reading.

- There have been no permanent exclusions since before 2012. The number of pupils who have been given fixed-term exclusions is too small to report on without the risk of individual pupils identified. Evidence shows that leaders make every effort to work with external agencies to ensure that any pupils who are at risk of exclusion receive appropriate help where needed. Excluding a pupil, rightly, remains a last resort for leaders.
- The school development plan is not sufficiently precise. It does not give enough detail for governors to be able to monitor rigorously the improvements that leaders are bringing about. This risks action being delayed, not taking place at all, or not evaluated thoroughly.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school development plan is clarified to enable the governing body to make timely and effective checks on the impact of actions that leaders are taking
- the weakest readers are given books that are appropriate for their ability.

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

Yours sincerely

Roary Pownall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and shared my lines of enquiry. I also met with representatives of the governing body, the deputy headteacher, the subject leader for English, and with the two teachers for Year 1. I considered the responses of parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and all free-text comments. I studied the results of Ofsted's staff questionnaire. Together we visited classes across the school. I looked at samples of pupils' work from different year groups and abilities. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and met with a large group of them at breaktime. I viewed a range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school's current performance and plans for further improvement. I considered a number of policy documents, including those for safeguarding. I examined the

school's website to check that it meets requirements on the publication of specified information.