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Mrs Jo Hutchinson  
Headteacher  
Higham Ferrers Nursery and Infant School  
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Dear Mrs Hutchinson

### **Short inspection of Higham Ferrers Nursery and Infant School**

Following my visit to the school on 23 February 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 September 2010.

#### **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 created a warm and welcoming environment where everyone is valued. You encourage staff at all levels to play their part in the life of the school. This school is a happy place in which to work and learn. The pupils and staff are proud to be a part of it. As one pupil explained, 'We all care about our school.'

School leaders and governors are highly aspirational for the pupils in the school. You all want the very best for them and you take care to provide for their needs, whether academic, social or emotional. Several parents told me they were pleased at how well the school had helped their child settle into school life. You value pupils' input into the life of the school, through the school council, for example.

Relationships and teamwork are pivotal to the success of Higham Ferrers Nursery and Infant School. There is a strong sense of supporting each other among the staff. You are keen to consult everyone when changes are made so that they feel involved in the developments in the school. An example of this was when you set about defining five values to permeate through the school and everything you do. Pupils, staff and parents alike had a say in these. They are highlighted regularly, including in assemblies and on display boards. Pupils enjoy earning value beads for their good behaviour and for demonstrating the school values.

You have maintained the strengths identified at the previous inspection. You and your leaders share the plans for school development with other staff and governors so that there is a strong commitment from everyone to implement further improvements. Pupils continue to take responsibility readily. Peer buddies and the elected school council know that their roles are important ones. They carry out their duties proudly. Pupils say that the school council helps to make their school even better. Pupils think that behaviour is good, and bullying is rare. Almost all parents who expressed a view agree with them. Pupils say that, if someone is unkind or doesn't have a friend to play with, a peer buddy will help them and a member of staff will not be far behind if further support is required.

You responded well to the areas for improvement at the last inspection. High on your list of importance has been making sure that the quality of teaching remains at least good over time. You have ensured that all staff have received the training they need to improve their practice. We saw the fruits of this during our tour of the school, with teaching assistants supporting pupils well and adults addressing misconceptions quickly, asking questions that extended pupils' learning effectively. Another area identified for development was to broaden pupils' understanding of other cultures. Pupils learn about Diwali and Chinese New Year. They have the chance to taste foods from different countries. Older pupils learn about Judaism. You know that this can be developed even further and you are keen to broaden the range of visitors into school. Pupils are beginning to understand about British values as you have linked them to your five school values and you make them a feature for assemblies.

The curriculum is designed to capture the interests of the pupils. It is enhanced by opportunities outside school, which pupils enjoy. Pupils enjoy visiting the theatre to see a pantomime and older pupils are looking forward to seeing a production of *The Lion King* in London. The school choir sings at the Higham Cultural Event in May and at the turning on of the Christmas lights. All pupils can take part in performances, such as at Christmas and Harvest.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Safeguarding is at the very top of your priorities. The leadership team has made sure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are well kept. All staff receive the appropriate training and a safeguarding message is a key feature of the staff briefing every Monday morning to make sure it is at the forefront of everyone's mind at all times. The appropriate checks are made when new staff or volunteers come into school. Governors have also had safeguarding training to make sure they are able to support you in this vital duty. The governor with responsibility for safeguarding visits the school regularly to check that all procedures are being followed rigorously.

Pupils feel safe at school. They were able to explain that they had been taught how to keep themselves safe, for example, when they are using the internet. Every parent who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, agreed that their child feels safe in school.

## Inspection findings

- As aspirational leaders and governors, you know the school well. When you identify an area that could be improved, you act swiftly and decisively. An example of this was when you rightly spotted that standards in writing were not as high as in reading or mathematics, particularly for boys. You have begun the process of improving pupils' outcomes in writing. During our tour of the classrooms, we saw that initiatives such as drama for writing and kinetic letters, a system of teaching handwriting, have been introduced and are beginning to have an impact on pupils' writing. Some pupils, however, were finding their writing task easy and more could have been asked of them. All pupils were aware that they had targets to help them improve their writing, such as including capital letters and full stops, which they were diligently remembering to do.
- Pupils get off to a flying start in the Nursery. During our time in this classroom, we saw very happy children playing and learning alongside each other and being well supported by the adults. No opportunity was missed to promote children's learning in this part of the school. For example, some children were hunting for hidden pictures of gingerbread men. They had ten to find around the outdoor area and they showed great perseverance, as they kept looking, never giving up. The adults supported this well, encouraging them as they went and celebrating each 'find' with a learning opportunity, such as counting the gingerbread man's buttons. Nursery staff's focus on promoting learning extends to children's personal development and behaviour. We heard staff modelling good manners and encouraging children to copy them.
- In the Reception classes, effective use is made of the outdoor area. We saw children building a den for the Three Billy Goats to hide from the troll. Staff were encouraging children to be creative and to work together. Children made good use of the wide range of resources that had been provided for them to use and some were enjoying writing notices for the den to keep the troll away. You are keen to develop the outdoor area for the Reception classes to provide even more opportunities for purposeful outdoor learning.
- There was an unusual dip in the proportion of Year 1 pupils achieving the expected standard in phonics in 2015. As we toured the school, we saw some effective teaching of phonics and with pupils making good progress in these sessions. However, this was not always the case. You recognise that the effective practice that already exists needs to be consistently applied across the school.
- Last year, there was an uncharacteristic dip in standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2. Nevertheless, outcomes were still close to or above national averages. You have wasted no time in identifying the reasons for this dip and you have already begun to put in place strategies that will make sure standards rise back to their typically high levels.
- You and your leaders have put in place a new assessment system in order to track pupils' progress very carefully. This is well understood by staff, and

termly meetings take place to check on the progress that pupils are making. You also check closely on the progress that groups of pupils are making and your leaders meet with staff to make sure that any additional support pupils may benefit from is quickly put into place. Your thorough systems show that pupils are continuing to make good progress.

- Parents are warmly welcomed at this school. Almost all of the 26 respondents to the online survey, Parent View, and those I met before school were very positive. One parent captured the views of many, remarking, 'It's a fantastic school – really supportive.' All parents agreed that the school is well led and managed and that their children feel safe. There are many opportunities for parents to take part in school life. They can attend workshops to find out more about the system of kinetic letters that you have introduced and about the curriculum to help them support their child with their learning. Well-attended coffee mornings offer an informal way for parents to come into school to see pupils' work. More recently, parents were invited in to be part of the balloon day in Nursery, the alien rocket day in Year 1 and the exhibition in the Reception classes.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the effective teaching of phonics in some classes is consistently applied across the school
- teachers have the highest expectations of what pupils can achieve in their writing, stepping in quickly to provide further challenge so that pupils can achieve the standards of which they are capable.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Northamptonshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Di Mullan

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I discussed aspects of the school's work with you, your deputy headteacher and four other senior leaders. I held a meeting with two members of the governing body and spoke to the local authority adviser on the telephone. I met with parents as they brought their children to school and I considered the responses of 26 parents to the online questionnaire, Parent View. We visited the Nursery and seven other classrooms to see the learning that was

taking place. I spoke with five pupils and four members of staff to gain their views of the school and I observed the pupils on the playground during afternoon break. We looked at some samples of pupils' work. I scrutinised a range of documents including the school's self-evaluation document and the school development plan, safeguarding records and the school's new assessment system.