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Ms Roanne Clements-Bedson
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Clements-Bedson

Short inspection of Knotty Ash Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 15 December 2016 with Linda Griffiths, Ofsted Inspector, 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 April 2012.

You were appointed as headteacher in January 2016.

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 maintained the central strength of Knotty Ash as a school where pupils are taught successfully to live according to important British values that will assist them in their lives in modern Britain. For example, children and pupils learn very well to respect differences between themselves and others. Deaf pupils who attend the deaf resource base are included and supported as much as possible within classes and school activities. There is harmony between pupils across the school. The success of your approach was very apparent to inspectors when observing the use of British Sign Language by hearing pupils across classes, even when no deaf pupil was present. Parents and staff commented very positively to inspectors that you make sure including deaf pupils is an important part of daily life in the school. Your vision for respect and inclusion extends just as much to other pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Several parents of these pupils told inspectors they are very happy with the thoughtful inclusion of their child, as well as their child's learning and progress.

You are making sure that Knotty Ash is a school where pupils arrive in lessons ready for the school day. Many pupils benefit from having been fed, settled and become ready for learning through attendance at the school breakfast club. Throughout the school, pupils continue to enjoy and learn from a wide range of extra learning. For example, regular opportunities for peer-to-peer massage and relaxation, learning to

play the guitar or learning to speak Spanish. Across classes, teaching is planned to excite pupils. There is a successful focus on science and discovery. Pupils enjoy learning about different communities. They learn to respect diversity, deepen their understanding of culture and refine their creative skills. The school makes determined efforts to celebrate a wide range of pupils' achievements. A recent ceremony involved awards given to pupils by the High Sheriff of Merseyside for behaviours such as determination, being a role model to others and being creative. Positive examples of pupils' work in their books, for example in mathematics, is copied into school newsletters as a celebration of pupils' success.

Pupils at Knotty Ash are proud of their school. They respond positively to the gentle, nurturing approach staff take to promoting good behaviour. For example, as stated on a school display board: 'If you don't do things correctly you will be whispered to.' Staff and leaders consult pupils regularly for their views of school. Pupils from the school council meet with staff regularly to discuss fundraising activities. They give staff feedback from their roles of representing the school at events in the city and they discuss possible improvements at Knotty Ash.

Since becoming headteacher, you have reviewed the work of the school and planned ahead with much thought and care. You have strengthened opportunities for staff to learn from one another and from training. You have worked closely with leaders and governors so there is even more review and challenge of what the school is achieving, as well as the key areas for improvement.

In response to the recommendation made by inspectors at the previous inspection, pupils are now given regular opportunities to use and apply their writing abilities across different subjects. As the new headteacher, you have rightly given a renewed focus to the teaching of writing because you are seeking to improve pupils' achievement further. You are making sure that there are many opportunities for pupils to be inspired to write through the books they read in the beautiful new key stage 2 library, as well as their exciting trips or meetings with visitors. The quality and range of current pupils' writing is now good because of the wide range of attention you and your staff are giving to this important aspect of pupils' learning. Pupils, including the most able, want to write. Nevertheless, you recognise that staff need to make even more thorough checks of older pupils' spelling in some of their work in key stage 2.

The inspector at the previous inspection recommended that leaders should make better use of school information when reviewing children's progress in the early years. You have made sure that staff and leaders now look much more carefully and regularly at a range of information about young children's play, development and learning. As a result, reviews of the work of the Nursery and Reception classes are more accurate and you are using information well to move the school forward. In your role as the new headteacher, you identified that you wanted to develop the quality of the early years provision in the school much further. Your close liaison with the local authority is helping you to improve the early years provision within the school. Because it has been necessary to change arrangements for leading the early years at Knotty Ash, you are keeping a close oversight of the work of the

Nursery and Reception classes yourself. We discussed that your next step is to establish new arrangements for the long-term leadership of the early years department.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. You have made sure that the school child protection policy meets all requirements and sets out clearly the specific approaches taken within Knotty Ash. A wide range of linked policies, for example about providing personal care to pupils, shows that the school takes safeguarding responsibilities seriously. Case files about individual pupils are maintained carefully and securely. Leaders link closely with other professionals in support of individual pupils, even attending meetings during school holiday periods so children continue to be well cared for. You fully understand your responsibilities about how to share safeguarding information with other schools when pupils leave.

You make sure that checks on the suitability of staff to work with pupils are clear, thorough and recorded well. You give staff regular and up-to-date training about safeguarding all pupils, including considering the needs of deaf pupils. To assist staff with understanding their responsibilities, you have produced a very well-considered leaflet about keeping pupils safe. Staff questioned by inspectors showed a clear knowledge of the different types of child abuse, including the risks to pupils when exposed to radicalised views of modern Britain. Staff know how to refer and follow up any concerns they may have about the safety of pupils or about the behaviour of any adult. Pupils are developing a good awareness of how to stay safe. This is because of the increased promotion of safety messages in lessons, in displays around the school and through information given to families, for example about staying safe when online.

Inspection findings

- The school gives a strong emphasis to promoting respect for deaf pupils and including deaf pupils across classes. Deaf pupils start at Knotty Ash with a range of needs; for example some pupils do not have spoken language or an ability to sign. The school immerses deaf pupils in lessons full of signing and speech, along with many opportunities to mix with other pupils. Thus, deaf pupils are gaining key skills in communication and integration, ready for their future life in mainstream secondary school. The success of the school's approach was very evident at the key stage 2 Christmas school production where all participating pupils were signing and it was not possible to identify who was deaf. A teacher of deaf pupils was guiding the whole gathering of pupils to sing and sign each of the songs. It was a moment of which all parents could be proud.
- One of the most positive aspects of the school is your impact on the quality and range of pupils' writing. Throughout the school, your high expectations show in the positive displays of pupils' writing in a range of subjects and for different audiences. Pupils who spoke to the inspector, including less-able and most-able pupils, showed high levels of confidence about writing. For example, Year 3

pupils were thrilled with a recent history visit to the city of Chester. They had learned much about the Romans and were greatly enthused by their increased knowledge. They were eager to share what they had written. Their work showed they had taken great thought and care about the quality of their writing, including in letters written to the museum. This success was echoed by a parent who commented that their child felt an urge to write about their day as soon as they returned home from the school trip.

- In Year 6, pupils' enthusiasm for writing has been supported well – they keenly edit and redraft their work and know why this skill is important. In science, good opportunities are now being used for pupils to apply their writing skills to specific topics. The most able pupils know how to improve their writing to reach higher standards. Throughout the school, pupils' work is showing much improvement in the standard of writing. For example, in Year 2 a majority of pupils are currently working at age-related expectations. Other pupils are having extra, individualised support to help them catch up. School information already indicates that a large majority of current Year 6 pupils are on track to achieve at least the standard expected of them in assessments of their writing next summer. Nevertheless, when some pupils have written spellings into personal dictionaries, staff are not always spotting and correcting errors. Pupils told inspectors of generally high expectations for their work and how they had noticed the increased demand upon them recently. The comment of one pupil was typical, 'The teacher doesn't want us to do average work – they want the best out of us – challenging us.' Another pupil commented, 'The good thing about being challenged is about going above your average.'
- You are successfully placing an increased focus on the value of reading within the school. Not only is this showing in the use of stories to stimulate better writing from pupils but you have improved the provision of books throughout the school. The new key stage 2 library is very well organised and presented. The library contains exciting displays that allow one to feel this is part of an underwater world or that one is located aboard a pirate ship. Pupils love entering the library and are excited about the special books and cosy places to read. Reading books used by pupils are cared for and well matched to their abilities. Pupils are reading regularly at home and school and increasingly being asked to identify what they understand of new texts. Pupils' attainment in the Year 1 phonics check is below national figures. However, pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are increasingly catching up in their phonics skills in Year 2. For pupils currently in Year 1, staff are tracking pupils' progress in phonics much more closely and using information more precisely to give specific support to pupils to strengthen their phonics skills. You have identified correctly that current improvements to teaching phonics in Reception will give children a better start with their reading skills in Year 1 in future.
- You are determinedly promoting attendance at school as a central value of Knotty Ash. Through newsletters sent home, messages on the school website and display boards around school, you are making very clear your expectations for good attendance by pupils. School information shows that the provision of the breakfast club is helping to improve attendance and punctuality. Recent figures for overall attendance show that the school is now in line with the attendance nationally. High attendance and improved attendance by individual pupils is

recognised and rewarded in school assemblies. You permit few absences and when pupils are absent you contact families quickly and regularly to ascertain the reasons. You review school information carefully; thus you know that current school absence figures are explained by a stomach bug affecting several pupils. Where families do not make sure pupils attend as well as they should, you look closely at the individual reasons and offer support where appropriate. This is helping to improve attendance. You work well with other professionals regarding attendance and issue fines to parents as necessary.

- Since taking up the post of headteacher, you have identified the early years as a priority for improvement. Improved teaching has increased the proportion of children making good progress from their starting points. However, you recognise that the overall proportion of children reaching a good level of development in 2016 was below that found nationally. With the agreement of governors you have linked very closely with the experts from the local authority to review in detail how improvements can be made. You have responded quickly to tackling aspects for improvement. You are involved closely in making sure staff skills are growing rapidly through increased support and training regarding teaching in the early years.
- When you and I observed teaching in Reception during the inspection, we identified good support for children's early language and phonics skills. We noted that staff questioning was adapted well to the needs of the most able children. We saw that play, talk and writing are being highly valued by staff within the activities provided. Children were given a wide range of opportunities to learn indoors and outdoors. Throughout the Nursery and Reception classrooms, staff are giving much attention to providing opportunities for children to enjoy high-quality fiction and non-fiction books, as well as opportunities for children to practise their writing.
- Changes in school staffing have meant that it has been necessary for you to reallocate leadership of the early years to yourself. While this step is assisting you to keep a close check on the pace of improvement, you acknowledge that this arrangement is a short-term solution. You are exploring a range of long-term possibilities to make sure that an experienced early years teacher leads this part of the school as soon as is practical.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- errors in spelling by older key stage 2 pupils in their work are identified and corrected more quickly by staff
- long-term arrangements are established for leadership of the early years so that the current improvement of provision for Nursery and Reception children continues strongly.

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

published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tim Vaughan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

To consider whether the school remains good, inspectors considered the following questions with leaders:

- How well is the school improving pupils' achievement in writing across the school and phonics in Year 1?
- How well are staff and leaders improving teaching and learning in the early years?
- How well is the school improving attendance?
- How effective is safeguarding?

Inspectors visited the breakfast club and different classrooms to observe teaching, including provision made for deaf pupils. I observed teaching in the Reception class jointly with you. Inspectors looked at examples of pupils' work and talked to pupils about their learning. Inspectors spoke with several parents during the inspection and considered responses made by parents in response to the online Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors spoke with a number of teachers and leaders about their work. I met with four members of the school governing body, including the chair. Inspectors reviewed school records of checks made on the suitability of staff to work with pupils. Inspectors considered records made by leaders about the care and protection of pupils and reviewed the quality of school policies relating to child protection.

During the morning of the inspection, key stage 1 pupils performed their Christmas production. Key stage 2 pupils performed their Christmas production during the afternoon and one inspector had the privilege to observe their performance for a while. No Nursery children attended school during the morning because all early years children attended a Christmas party during the afternoon.

The inspection was observed by another of Her Majesty's Inspectors who played no part in the judgements made about the school.