



HESLEDEN PRIMARY SCHOOL



7 May 2020

Dear Parents/Carers,

I hope this letter finds you and your families continuing to be well. We are hearing so many stories of how Coronavirus is affecting people and causing loss, that our thoughts are with anyone who finds themselves in such a sad situation.

I am, however, writing to you with a very different reason to previous letters.

You will remember that, two weeks before schools were closed, we were visited by Ofsted. Because of the current situation, Ofsted decided not to publish reports to their website, or to parents, although schools were sent a copy of the report.

I am writing to you now because Ofsted have said that schools can publish their reports and send copies to parents. I wanted you to have an overview of the inspection day, from our perspective, to help you understand how we feel inspectors made their comments in the report.

Our inspection day was a very busy one, for inspectors, staff and children. The inspection only lasted one day and the timetable was incredibly tight, with inspectors wanting to observe lessons, speak to and work with staff, and carry out discussions with children (mostly with a clash of timings). Very early in the day, the inspectors fell behind time and some important activities were not carried out, such as observing English/reading in KS2, or talking about work in books with leaders, missing opportunities to make additional judgements.

What we do well

Hesleden continues to be a good school.

Throughout the day, our children, as they always do, behaved brilliantly. They worked hard in classes and their conduct and manners around school were excellent. Our Rights Respecting ethos was recognised and the school is judged as a happy place to work and learn.

Safeguarding requirements are in place and secure, and we support families well. There is a positive regard for well-being of both adults and children.

Family Fridays were recognised as a time when the strong relationships staff have with parents are strengthened.

Staff are enthusiastic and are keen to ensure the school develops well. This includes them attending training, and raising the profile of reading.

The report has two other main foci: reading/phonics and curriculum planning.

Reading/Phonics

One inspector carried out observations across EY and KS1 groups, KS2 was not observed. They then listened to only six children read (Reception/Y1/Y2) and spoke to another group of six Y2 and Y3 children. As we would

have expected, the children tried hard in these sessions, however they were nervous and worried about 'not getting it right'. This is a position we think very unfair for children, particularly when the report seems to reflect the opinions of individuals. Our older children were not able to show off their learning, or give their views on reading/phonics.

There are also comments about progress and test data in reading and phonics, and while these are accurate, there is no background provided; for example, the number of children in our year groups varies widely each year and the data they comment on 'over time' includes cohorts of as large as 22 and as small as 10. The number of children who do not reach the expected standard is similar each year (2-3), but this has a huge impact on the percentage (i.e. $2/22 = 9\%$ and $2/10 = 20\%$).

Curriculum

Comments relate to the way in which our curriculum is developing. The curriculum focus for the day was on a single subject and the observations and discussions with children were carried out by the second inspector. Again, staff were expected to be in two places at once, and children were not really put at ease throughout their session – the inspector typed behind a screen, rather than engaged with the group.

Our curriculum is under constant review and in September 2019 we set out to restructure how this was planned and delivered. As part of the new inspection framework, schools were to be given time to do this so we know we are only at the early stages of a journey. Although we believe we are making good progress the comments in the report will focus the next stages of our work.

Every subject is expected to have a 'leader' and this means, in our small school, every teacher leads 2-3 subjects, which takes a huge amount of time and work. We had, however, put a monitoring timetable in place (with governors), from January, but this was only new and not yet fully embedded – we were not expecting this inspection for some months yet.

Summary and next steps

While the inspection day was very intense, and we are disappointed with some of the comments in the report, we know that we are always on a journey to improve and many of the ways forward are already planned. Inspectors will return to the school to fully inspect our progress and provision within 1-2 years.

Our curriculum is under redevelopment, and during this time of school closure, this is what subject leaders have focussed on. They are developing plans to support learning across the curriculum, so that when we return to school, our focus can be on the children's wellbeing.

Once we do return to school, and are settled, we will be sharing our work with you – though we will probably wait until the autumn term. This will include curriculum plans, new topics and a restructured timetable for learning. We will also be asking you to help in supporting your child at home – particularly in reading/phonics, and we will tell you about this when the time is right.

Staff and governors would like to thank the parents who made contributions to the inspection through the Parent View survey and, as always, to the children who make us delighted and proud to be part of Hesleden Primary School.

The Inspection report is on our school website: <http://www.hesleden.durham.sch.uk/about-us/school-performance/>

We thank you for your ongoing support, and as ever, if we can be of any help to you during this time, please do get in touch.

Regards,

Mrs Dunn
Headteacher

Andrew Stafford
Chair of Governors