

Spring Meadow Infant and Nursery School

Head Teacher Response to the March 2020 Inspection report

The new Ofsted framework requires inspectors to undertake a 'deep dive' during their visit to the school. A 'deep dive' is where an inspector looks at a particular subject such as reading and explore how leadership impacts, how it is planned for, taught by the staff, experienced by the child and the amount of progress made over time. Inspectors look at evidence available over the two days and judgements are made based on snap-shots seen, these do not necessarily represent the long term work of the school nor the outcomes for different groups of children.

This document will provide an overview of the areas Ofsted identified that we do well and those that Ofsted identify as needing to be improved and the Spring Meadow response to these comments.

I would prefer to invite parents in to school to respond to the Inspection findings and the reasons for the judgements made. However, during the school closure period we are not permitted to do so.

Areas identified as those we do really well

1. Ofsted said:

'The Head teacher has provided a clear vision for staff, raised confidence in the staff during a period of staff reductions, provided professional development for staff and, along with governors, has a very clear understanding of the journey the school is on.'

1. Spring Meadow response:

The opening of a new school in Ely before it was actually needed has meant that the number of children attending Spring Meadow has reduced over the last three years. As a result the school needed to reduce staff. This requirement is very unsettling for the community.

The Head Teacher ensured she valued the contribution of every member of the team and implemented rigorous performance management systems to enhance this further. This has meant that staff have clear targets to improve their skills, where needed, and that these newly acquired skills have a positive impact on the children.

She has targeted staff to undertake high-quality training, so specialist teams can thrive. The journey to develop all staff continues as new expectations and demands come from the Department for Education and Ofsted.

2. Ofsted said:

'The Head Teacher has restructured the teaching team. Phonics, reading and maths has a clear structure. In Key Stage 1, reading books are well matched to pupils' phonic skills. The teaching of reading is well-structured and pupils develop effective comprehension skills. By the end of Year 2, almost all pupils can read fluently and with expression. Children in the Reception year learn very quickly how to write words by applying their phonic skills.'

2. Spring Meadow response:

Leadership in the areas above is good, the quality of the training provided for all staff over the past two years has been excellent. Mrs Tomlin, Mrs Plant and Mrs Kansu have worked unrelentingly with the teaching team and support staff team to ensure every required skill has been developed to the highest standard possible. A significant investment was made into purchasing new reading books, training for all staff to deliver phonics and a complete reorganisation of how reading books are graded for pupil use. We were very pleased that these core skills were identified as being 'good' as a result of the quality of leadership in the areas of phonics, reading and maths.

3. Ofsted said:

'Children skip enthusiastically into the Nursery and Reception Years at the start of the day. Children fully engage with the activities in the well-resourced classrooms. The school's values help pupils to be kind, brave and curious. From the

Nursery Year to Year 2, pupils develop skills to work independently or within groups. Pupils are articulate and reflective, and can say what they find difficult in their learning.

School trips, for example to London and the zoo, are used well to enhance pupils' learning and introduce new topics. Pupils talk proudly about Ely Cathedral and their local community. They can discuss different faiths and are keen to share their learning and talk about the different people who visit.'

3. Spring Meadow response:

We have been supporting our children to be independent learners, to question and to challenge themselves through the setting of more complex tasks. Ofsted recognised that we have achieved this on our journey.

We have set a clear vision, which children and adults alike have all bought into and strive to meet at all times. Ofsted recognised this too and said our children modelled these at all times.

Our curriculum is extensive, it is exciting, it is innovative and growing over time. We do work to enhance this learning to engage all children and again this was recognised, which was just fantastic.

Many leaders are new to their role. Leaders continue to grow their skills as expertise as required under the new Inspection Framework, which came into force on 1st September 2019.

4. Ofsted said:

'The welfare of the children is a high priority.'

4. Spring Meadow response:

This has and always will be the case – it was pleasing that this was recognised. It is an area which is a non-negotiable and will always sit above any other expectation.

5. Ofsted said:

'Pupils are considerate of others' needs. They understand and respect each other's differences.'

5. Spring Meadow response:

The school's key values are for every child to be kind, brave and curious. Kindness is a strong thread that runs through the school as a result of the unrelenting messages shared daily. Our children all know how to be kind to each other and to value each other's special and unique attributes. Our school is a happy and harmonious place to be.

6. Ofsted said:

'The school's Infant Assessment Unit offers strong provision for pupils with complex needs.'

6. Spring Meadow response:

We call our specialist provision Rainbows. We have ten children in this provision and four adults. This is because most children have an Education and Health Care Plan, which brings significant additional funding to the school. This funding is used to employ additional staff to support the complex needs of the children. As a result of the expertise of the staff in the provision, and the high staff to pupil ratio, we can and do positively impact on every child socially and academically. We are very fortunate to have a specialist provision to set a model for us to follow in the main body of the school.

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Ofsted Report – Response to areas identified as needing to improve

1. Ofsted said:

‘Not all curriculum subjects are sufficiently developed. This is preventing pupils from receiving a good-quality curriculum that helps them develop their understanding of the world around them.’

1. Spring Meadow response

In Year 1 and Year 2 the inspectors spoke to children about instruments they learned to play outside of school. They asked the children if they did this music in school and the children said no. We do teach music lessons each week, but do not have specialist musical instrument lessons.

We had just completed a half-term project which focused on geography in the local area, where we immersed our children in Year 1 and Year 2 into this body of knowledge. This was to ensure deeper and more meaningful learning could take place. The achievement of this was acknowledged by inspectors. The curriculum development planned for this academic year was structured to achieve this deeper learning and this requirement to develop this further in all subjects continues.

The curriculum requirements for schools under the new Framework has changed. Ofsted said schools would be given time to develop required changes over the academic year 2019 – 2020. Many developments of the curriculum have taken place in our school already; it is a complex process where it is essential to make relevant links for the children. Since the Inspection in March we have developed more detailed written plans to illustrate the approaches we use. This work continues to ensure that an observer cannot say our children do not receive a good curriculum when we know that they do.

2. Ofsted said:

‘Teachers are not using what they know about pupils’ learning to plan activities that will develop learning further. This means that pupils who have skills and knowledge above the curriculum on offer are not having their needs met well enough. Teachers across the school must ensure that they are building on what pupils already know.’

2. Spring Meadow response

The inspectors were very impressed with the standard of work produced by the children in our school. We have incredibly articulate children who are inspired by the curriculum topics and themes we deliver. Many children explore further when school ends and can discuss their learning when they return to school. They were able to share this with inspectors also during their visit. As a result inspectors questioned if we should be stretching our children more whilst in the classroom. The curriculum development work has continued at a pace during this period of national change in terms of how the curriculum is delivered to all children. During our current partial opening we have implemented a personalised learning approach for each child. This will be expanded when the school re-opens fully.

3. Ofsted said:

‘Pupils’ writing across the school is not well-enough developed. Some pupils’ work does not reflect what they are capable of. Leaders need to ensure that the writing curriculum builds on what pupils already know so that pupils can achieve as well as they are able to.’

3. Spring Meadow response

Ofsted felt children in the Nursery and Reception make marks when they first begin to write, but that these marks do not get better fast enough. They felt that these very young children should be compelled to write, even if they do not wish to do so as a 3 or 4 year old.

Ofsted felt that our very able writers across the school write really well. They questioned why we revisit specific writing elements, such as using connecting words in sentences, when a child is already able to use these most of the time.

We do revisit key criteria in writing for our children to ensure they are secure. We do then extend to a greater challenge when we have assessed a child is secure. Ofsted would like us to do this faster.

Since the Inspection we have produced a more personalised approach to planning to meet the needs of the more able children and those who find work difficult. It is currently being trialled during the phased return to school period. This approach ensures specific groups do not repeat learning, but always build on it, even if that learning has not been revisited for many months.

4. Ofsted said:

‘Leaders of some subjects are new in post. They do not know whether pupils are achieving well enough through the curriculum. They need to ensure that their monitoring is rigorous, so that they can hold teachers to account more precisely for the quality of teaching and learning.’

4. Spring Meadow response

The new inspection process requires every teacher to be a leader. Leadership is now an expectation of every teacher, regardless of the fact that every teacher works full-time in the classroom. It is an expectation even if that teacher is not a subject specialist. The inspection is a model based on that used in senior schools around the country, where all teachers are subject specialists.

I am extremely proud of the work every teacher has done to develop the curriculum, all undertaken at weekends, after school etc. This requirement to lead in this way is new and we are developing the curriculum collaboratively once more.

Monitoring of subjects will form part of the School Improvement Plan for 2020-2021, where support and development for teachers will be a priority, so they know what standards are across the school. Some of this work has been undertaken during the lock-down period.

5. Ofsted said:

‘In some subjects and year groups, pupils are not encouraged to take pride in their work. Leaders need to ensure that there is a consistency in the presentation of pupils’ work across the school.’

5. Spring Meadow response

Our children are aged 3 to 7. Our children learn how to make marks, hold writing implements and learn the letter shapes and the sounds that match. We are proud of our children’s attempts to become writers as really small people.

We use the Nelson handwriting scheme and by the end of Year 2, the vast majority of children have beautiful handwriting, formed precisely as required.

We plan to review the starting points of formal teaching of handwriting. At the present time it begins towards the end of Nursery for some children and grows at a pace in Reception. We are working closely with the Early Years Advisory Service to ascertain if the expectation is that we do this as soon as a child arrives at the age of 3.

We also plan a review of how work is recorded. There is no requirement from Ofsted to record in any specific way, or indeed to record anything at all. We will continue to develop the social, emotional and mental well-being for every child.

6. Ofsted said:

‘With the exception of those in the Assessment Unit, pupils with SEND are not achieving as well as they should. Targets to improve are not clear and therefore learning is hindered. Teachers need to draw on the good practice and expertise from adults working in the Assessment Unit to make sure that pupils in classes receive their full curriculum entitlement.’

6. Spring Meadow response

Ofsted felt that the documentation we had was comprehensive and very detailed. They felt teachers clearly recorded what the child needed to do to improve and what actions they would take.

They felt that the specialist provision in our school, which has a teacher/child ration of 1:2.5 (1 adult for every 2 and a half children) evidenced an excellent model of personalised learning for each child with significant special needs. This was very pleasing. In a mainstream class however, the ratio is usually 1 teacher to 26 children. They felt that the work teachers do to ensure every child is included, and does not feel targeted and pulled away from the fun activities to play catch-up, was not best for the child who is below expectations.

We have been developing personalised learning and changed the documentation processes we use so that annual documentation is reduced and the day-to-day paper work refined. As a result, information is more readily accessible for the staff in the classrooms. We cannot increase the ratio of adults in a room, nor can any other school across the country because the government do not fund schools well enough to do this, but we can further improve the systems we use.