



*Loving to learn, Learning to love.  
For every child a chance to shine*



**LAYSTON C of E FIRST SCHOOL**  
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**Head teacher: Mrs Adele McMurrough**

Friday 9<sup>th</sup> February 2024

Dear Parents and Carers,

### OFSTED report for Layston C of E First School

As you will be aware, we welcomed Ofsted to our school on Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> October - Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> November 2023. We are now writing to share with you the final report which will be published by Ofsted on Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

As a nurturing, reflective and hardworking school we always welcome constructive feedback from external agencies and we are committed to moving the school forward through continual review and consultation. This is something that the school has been doing regularly over the years with visits from our School Improvement Adviser, Teaching and Learning Advisers and a wide range of other external agencies.

### **Context of the inspection**

On Monday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2023 we were notified by Ofsted that we were to be inspected the following day. This notification came at a time when we were without a Deputy Head Teacher, SENDCo and Mental Health Lead as Mrs Betley was absent from work due to illness. Also due to staff absence, our EYFS were reliant on 3 cover staff who had joined the team the day before the inspection. This meant that we were functioning with a significant reduction in our senior leadership team and in our EYFS setting.

We celebrate the positives of the report, of which there are many. However, after reading the report, we are sure you will understand our disappointment over some of the judgements made. Soon after our inspection, changes were made to Ofsted's Inspection Framework. Many of you will have seen this in the media. We hope that going forward inspectors will be more professional, empathetic, respectful, and courteous. Sadly this was not our experience.

A copy of the full report is attached to this letter and can be found on the website. We would like to share with parents and carers that many of the statements in the report were challenged by our Governing Body as part of the initial feedback. We also made a formal complaint to Ofsted as we felt that the circumstances surrounding the inspection prevented Ofsted from gathering the information needed to come to a fully informed judgement. We have received apologies surrounding the conduct and process of the inspection, but Ofsted have not changed their conclusions.

Below we summarise the report and outline how we are responding.





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## Strengths

Ofsted made many positive comments about the school:

"Many pupils behave well. They display positive attitudes to learning. Most classrooms are calm and orderly."

"Pupils value and respond positively to the care and nurture they receive. Pupils have strong relationships with adults. These help them to feel settled and safe."

"A well-structured personal development programme is in place. This ensures that pupils understand how to stay safe and develop a good understanding of different cultures and beliefs. Pupils are being prepared well for life in modern Britain."

"Pupils demonstrate an understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They know how to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Pupils show respect for one another. They treat their friends with kindness and care. Older pupils thrive on the opportunity to become 'buddies'. They enjoy looking after the younger children or helping others who need a friend at playtime."

"An array of wider opportunities, including clubs and outdoor learning, are on offer. These activities expand pupils' horizons and nurture their interests. Pupils from different year groups enthuse about learning in the forest."

"In Years 1 to 4, the school has worked successfully with external support to develop a curriculum that focuses on the knowledge pupils need... In subjects such as mathematics, the curriculum has been precisely planned and pupils learn the intended knowledge successfully."

"The school understands the importance of pupils learning to read fluently. Pupils' reading books are matched to the sounds they are learning. Staff are trained well to teach reading. All pupils are checked regularly."

"Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are generally well supported. Teachers make adjustments so that pupils with SEND can access the full curriculum alongside their peers. "

"The arrangements for safeguarding are effective."

"Staff value the support of school leaders. They speak positively about the 'open door' policy and the emotional support they receive around their well-being."





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## **Areas for development**

Ofsted have detailed the following as areas for development for the school:

"The early years curriculum is not being implemented successfully. It is disconnected and does not prepare children for their next stage of learning...The school must ensure that the early years curriculum is reviewed, planned and implemented effectively to ensure that the needs of all children are met to prepare them well for Year 1."

"The school should work closely with the school community to ensure there is a shared vision and understanding around the school's chosen approach to managing pupils' challenging behaviour."

"In some foundation subjects, the school's curriculum is not precisely planned to ensure pupils successfully learn the intended knowledge over time. There are inconsistencies in how the curriculum is taught and assessed. The school should ensure that it sets out the precise knowledge pupils need to learn and ensure assessment is used carefully to check pupils are learning and remembering the content."

"The school does not have an accurate view of its strengths and development areas. The governing body has not held school leaders to account with enough rigour...Leaders should ensure that they establish accurate evaluation systems and act to improve weak aspects of the school. The governing body must hold leaders to account with greater rigour to ensure that all pupils learn more and achieve well."

## **Overall judgement**

Ofsted have graded their views against their inspection framework as follows:

Overall effectiveness - Requires improvement  
The quality of education - Requires improvement  
Behaviour and attitudes - Good  
Personal development - Good  
Leadership and management - Requires improvement  
Early years provision - Inadequate

## **Actions and the work the school has already undertaken**

Many of the areas for development were known to our curriculum leaders and governors and were already being worked on as part of our school development plan. For example, further information on the school's behaviour policy was shared with parents and carers shortly before the Ofsted visit and the most recent Parent Chat session also covered this topic. We have also put in place a Rapid Action Plan (RAP) in response to the inspection judgements and to help school leaders and governors focus on achieving the necessary changes. Below we summarise this action plan and progress to date.





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1. Ensure clarity of focus within the School Development Plan (SDP) results in more accurate school self-evaluation.	We have re-evaluated the SDP in light of the Ofsted comments and shared with all staff and governors in consultation with our School Improvement Advisor.
2. Ensure EYFS learning environment enables the EYFS curriculum to be enacted in the classroom.	We have continued our consultations with our Early Years Teaching and Learning Advisor and have a separate EY action plan. Our main areas for development are improving the outdoor environment and extending early writing opportunities.
3. Ensure subjects are planned from Reception so that learning builds on foundational knowledge.	Subject leaders have already met to discuss how the EYFS feeds into the national curriculum in their subjects. This document is now on the school website in the Reception class page. All subjects now have explicit skills progression documented on the subject curriculum maps. For example, our school improvement partner met with the Art lead and is happy that there is a clear progression of skills from EYFS through to Y4.
4. Clarify end points so that clear assessment procedures can be devised and implemented.	Following on from action 3 all subject leads have been working on identifying end points for assessment in their subjects.
5. Develop a shared understanding of leader's vision in how children are supported to manage behaviours.	Ofsted identified a small number of support staff and parents who did not fully understand, and were therefore not fully on board with, the Therapeutic Thinking (STEPS) approach recommended by the local authority. All staff have revisited the training in January and our parent chat next week (Thursday 15 <sup>th</sup> Feb 9:00) will focus on sharing this in greater depth with parents.
6. Embed the whole school approach to supporting SEND pupils.	Work had already started on this area early last year with training for our support staff from Amwell View Outreach on autism as well as, later in the year, developing independence, resilience and chunking learning. Mrs Betley is continuing to develop staff confidence in supporting pupils with SEND.

We know that everyone will have a variety of reactions to the above information. We urge you to read the full report and alongside reflect on your individual experience of our school. If you have any questions or comments please contact us via the school office. ([admin@layston.herts.sch.uk](mailto:admin@layston.herts.sch.uk)).

We look forward to working together to continue to progress our School Development Plan. As always, we will continue striving to deliver the best outcomes and experiences for your children whilst they are in our care.

Best wishes,  
Adele McMurrrough  
Head teacher

Colin Wilson  
Chair of Governors

