

**Herts for Learning
Hertfordshire Improvement Partner Report**

2020-2021 Spring Term Visit - Primary School Version

School:	Giles Nursery and Infants School	Number:	160	Date:	17.03.2021 & 18.03.21
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Present: Rouane Mendel (Headteacher); Judith Garley (Deputy Headteacher, Most Able and Disadvantaged Pupils Lead, Year 2 Class Teacher); Lisa Hill (English and Phonics Subject Leader, Year 2 Class Teacher and Group Leader); Kerrhys Edwards (Science and Computing Subject Leader, Year 1 Group Leader, e-Safety Leader and joint leader for Forest Schools); Maxine Humphrey (Disadvantaged Pupils Lead and Year 2 Teacher); Emma McPartland (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo)); Vicky Stanton (Family Support Worker (FSW)); Lisa Dacombe (Early Years (EY) Leader) and Carole Hinstridge (Hertfordshire Improvement Partner)
Kate Long (Co-Chair of Governors) Stephanie Stephens (Co-Chair of Governors)

Purpose of the visit: to support leaders to explore the quality of education implemented either face-to-face, or remotely

Outline of visit:

The headteacher and HIP discussed the spring term visit via telephone call and email during which the visit activities were agreed and the headteacher prepared a timetable. The following documentation was shared by the headteacher in advance of the meeting: Remote Learning Contingency Plan and Review of Remote Education Provision. The HIP reviewed documentation available on the school's website which included: communications to parents, Curriculum Journey English: Phonics 2020-21, English – Phonics, Handwriting, Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar Key Vocabulary 2020-21, Quality SEND Offer – The Giles Nursery and Infants' School and Pupil Premium Strategy and Financial allocation 2020-21.

Main findings/observations:

The following report complements the detailed feedback given to senior leaders and governors as part of the day's activities.

The HIP and senior leaders explored the quality of provision offered to families during the period of lockdown starting in January 2021. Much had been learned from the partial school closure in March 2020 and senior leaders had researched digital platforms that would best suit the school's context. Purple Mash was introduced to children and families in the autumn term and, therefore, parents and pupils were familiar with its format when schools were asked to switch to remote learning in January 2021. The learning activities provided were linked, as much as possible, to the school's intended curriculum. Pupils had access to a wide range of subjects which were evidenced throughout the HIP's visit. Senior leaders have an in-depth knowledge of their school community and were rigorous in monitoring engagement to ensure equity of experience for all pupils. Unable to take advantage of the government's laptop scheme, leaders were determined to provide as many devices from school stock as possible and prepared iPads for distribution to families, with priority focused on disadvantaged pupils. Leaders have been proactive in evaluating the quality of provision. For example, they worked through the DfE's remote education provision framework to identify the strengths of the school's provision and areas for further enhancement. Small tweaks were designed to increase connectivity with families unable to engage fully in digital learning. This included preparing comprehensive paper versions of the weekly curriculum offer for parents to collect from school. Staff capitalised on these opportunities to have conversations whilst the packs were collected which gave positive, encouraging feedback to parents

about their children's achievements. Carefully designed learning activities were prepared to ease pressures on family life and to inspire the children to be creative away from screens. Parent feedback has demonstrated how appreciative families are of the support shown to them during periods of great uncertainty. Excellent communication has been evident in keeping families informed, helping to overcome difficulties with technology and to remain connected with each other. Dedicated class email accounts were set up immediately the lockdown was announced. Therefore parents were able to keep in touch with teachers and maintain a dialogue that may ordinarily happen at the classroom door. The HIP includes a small selection of emails, representative of the many received by leaders, which evidence the impact that the bespoke approach to home learning had on families.

"Thanks for your reply and considering my request to upload the work as per the days wise. I hope we not troubling you a lot. It just so new to us to work on, that's why so many queries are coming. I can imagine how hard time you all must be having to keep up with remote teaching plus class teaching. Really appreciate each ones hard work. Once again thank you for your support and answering all queries."

"Thank you for you replying to every email, it definitely keeps xxxx a bit more connected to school and makes her want to continue going through her learnings."

"I also would like to thank you and maxine for being absolutely amazing and knowing im not a bad mum, im just a mummy that wants the best for my little girl. I understand everyone is having a hard time due to this awful pandemic, I could never thank you all enough for the hard work you have done and continuing to do.

The kindest regards ever."

"xxxx is very happy when I read your email. She's over the moon that you are writing to her. Thank you very much for your support. When she doesn't feel like reading or doing her homework I'm telling her about your beautiful emails and because she wants to get some more emails from you she quickly starts her jobs.

xxxx was super excited about creating and decorating her gingerbread man. We made it from proper dough so she's eat it at the end.

We are trying our best, to have a routine with homework and everything but she still miss school. Hope to see you soon."

Attention to safeguarding was evident in leaders' decision making. When introducing Zoom calls with small groups of children, parents were made aware of stringent protocols and staff training took place. Staff trialled the approach before rolling Zoom calls out across the school. This platform enabled children to celebrate World Book Day, for staff to conduct well-being checks, story-telling sessions and facilitated regular assemblies. Teaching was delivered via pre-recorded videos to enable families to access learning at a time that suited their particular dynamics and allowed for children to pause and replay as necessary. In this way, staff knew that families with multiple children would not experience access issues due to limited devices and that children who needed to revisit concepts would be able to learn at their pace. Teacher recorded videos were well received by parents and, in particular, empowered parents in supporting their children's handwriting practice.

Regular phone calls to children were timetabled to keep motivation high and to give reassurance where needed.

Staff have been innovative in collecting pupil voice during lockdown. 'Selfie cam' on Purple Mash has been used to capture feedback on learning activities. It is evident from a range of sampled comments that children have enjoyed a breadth of activities with some pupils articulate their achievements whilst home learning. For example, one child stated, "I learnt to write a sentence on my own and I can write (my) full name now. I would like to concentrate on my writing more." Another described, "I enjoyed

learning science about egg explosion. I would like to learn how are rocks made.” In this way, teachers have replicated the processes that would ordinarily have taken place within classroom settings.

Other functions of Purple Mash, such as display boards, have been explored to maintain a sense of connectivity between those pupils learning from home and key worker and vulnerable (KWV) children in school. Children created, mostly digital, pictures to represent the Northern Lights as part of their Antarctica project and these could be viewed by all pupils. Voice notes were used by pupils and staff to leave messages for each other. In this way, feedback could be shared that was highly personalised and teachers report this increased engagement and motivation.

<https://theeducation.exchange/learning-from-lockdown-using-technology-to-empower-parents/>

The HIP encouraged senior leaders to reflect on digital innovations that may have long term impact on school or classroom practice. For example, teacher recorded videos may empower parents to understand how phonics is taught in a cumulative way or how Zoom sessions have enabled some hard to reach parents to engage more fully in understanding their child’s progress through the curriculum. Leaders intend to explore ‘Covid Keeps’ as part of their evaluation process.

Remote learning provision for pupils identified as disadvantaged (DVP) and those with SEND were discussed. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding is 23%, which is above the national average of 18% (maintained primary schools 2020). However, leaders believe this figure is likely to be masked by the universal free school meal offer for key stage 1 and EY pupils. All DVP were offered a place in school during the January 2021 lockdown with 21 places taken up. Leaders have been rigorous in their monitoring and pupil progress meetings focused on DVP and pupils with SEND and their engagement in remote learning. A number of actions were taken to increase engagement:

- Providing iPads
- Check in phone calls offering support and advice to parents
- Phone calls to children to praise and encourage
- Involvement with SENCo and FSW
- Bespoke learning packs to support those pupils with complex needs
- Resource packs to ensure all DVP had access to equipment to complete their learning
- Learning videos to explain teaching strategies in mathematics

As a result, senior leaders noted more pupils completing learning tasks and parents appreciated the bespoke support their children were receiving. The HIP includes a small selection of messages which exemplify how parents value the school’s actions:

“Thank you so much for your email, i want to encourage xxx learning as much as possible but it’s difficult for him (and i assume other children too) with the distractions at home. As I mentioned on the phone I’ve struggled with terrible anxiety over my youngest sons health since his been born and i feel guilty and i suppose shame and worry over how people would view me if i told them so that’s why i hadn’t been in touch or reached out, so thank you for being so understanding. The books that ive bought have been really helpful and they are quick activities we can do which xxx can remain focused on but as i said maths has been a struggle so i look forward to hearing from the other teacher and her ideas. we have done baking and he has learnt to read the scales and counting and cracking eggs and helping to do lunch and dinners too, so am hopeful that he will at least learn plenty of general life skills during this time. he cannot wait to get back to school. Your amazing teachers and i can’t thank you all enough for all the efforts you are making.”

“Have just looked through the pack for xxx thank you it's actually made me cry abit you and Mrs Garley are the best and you care so much about every child. We so appreciate it. please stay safe.”

“I 100% understand that xxx does have additional needs and hopefully we can work out what it is so we can get her the help she so needs. xxx has been though so much in her little life and I can never thank the school enough for being such a great support to her.”

Evidence was shared with the HIP that demonstrates that communication across the team ensured that swift action was taken to support families when teachers noted pupil engagement was waning and concerns were reported to members of the senior leadership team. Actions taken included re-organising KWV groups so that pupils could be accommodated in school.

Senior leaders ensured that meetings with external agencies in support of vulnerable families and those with SEND continued throughout lockdown. In addition, leaders embraced training opportunities in order to support those families who experienced bereavement. The school is participating in the Achievement for All project with the aim to strengthen communication with parents. Training on 'structured conversations' has taken place and these will be used during spring term parent consultations. Longer term aims dovetail with the school's STEPs approach to therapeutic behaviour management and will work towards equipping pupils with the skills to self-regulate, improve their well-being and resilience. Case studies shared with the HIP documents the progress made by some vulnerable pupils in school has accelerated in lockdown. This is because, with fewer pupils in school, leaders have worked imaginatively to exploit opportunities to build relationships by being available and to deliver bespoke training to staff who provide 1:1 support. In this way, pupils have received intensive phonics input and flourished in smaller group environments. Senior leaders continue to reflect on what has worked well for pupils in school and how this provision could be replicated.

Crucial to the well-being of the school community has been regular, detailed communication and activities designed to focus on gratitude. During half term, children were encouraged to design, make and send thank you cards to organisations within the local community, for example, The Lister Hospital, care homes, the post office and police station. A further project used the school as a focus for leaving messages for one another on ribbons tied to the school gates. Leaders report that both initiatives gave the families and staff a sense of togetherness and to appreciate how working together provides strength for one another. The messages and pictures shared with the HIP were delightful.

Leaders have anticipated how some pupils, and their families, may benefit from additional support in their return to school. Soft starts and ends to the day have helped pupils manage their anxieties. Leaders' visible presence allows for timely intervention when children feel most anxious and parents appreciate telephone calls to reassure them that their child has settled.

The HIP and senior leaders discussed the profound impact that decisions made by strong leadership can have on supporting the whole community during a time of crisis.

The HIP, headteacher and EY leader reviewed examples of recorded phonics lessons and a selection of set activities which had been completed by pupils. These included video clips submitted by parents of their children reading aloud and included evidence of children using their 'reading finger'. The format of recorded lessons reflect regular classroom practice of: revisit and review followed by teach, practise and then apply. Leaders have made excellent use of the website to post key information to support parents in understanding how phonics and letter formation are taught. Leaders report that consistency of implementation is key to the success of teaching phonics across the school. Robust induction programmes are in place for new members of staff to observe quality first teaching and for shadowing opportunities with exemplary practitioners. Evidence of remote learning shared with the HIP

demonstrates that a wealth of writing opportunities were presented to pupils which matched, precisely, to children’s phonic knowledge enabling them to encode and decode. Children take pride with handwriting and presentation and complete their home learning to the high standards expected by their teachers. This would suggest that activities are engaging and pitched correctly. The EY leader described how low stakes phonic games would be used to assess pupils who have been learning from home. This way, targeted support of booster session and 1:1 teaching will help pupils who may have fallen behind to catch up and keep up. Feedback time is planned for staff working with children so that all learning is cohesive and delivered with precision.

The HIP includes the following as areas of interest to senior leaders:

- [Shared reading of the lockdown kind: delivering parent/carer support sessions remotely | Herts for Learning](#)
- <https://theeducation.exchange/learning-from-lockdown-using-technology-to-empower-parents/>
- [Ten ways in which digital technology can support schools in a post-Covid world | Herts for Learning](#)

School’s own view/evaluation of its overall effectiveness (on the basis of leaders’ on-going self-evaluation):	The governors recognise and congratulate the team for the incredible support shown to the community during turbulent times. Communication has been excellent throughout and responses to parents have been timely, reassuring and inspiring. Staff retention is high and people are invested in which supports harmonious relationships.
HIP RAYG rating:	Dark Green
HIP comment:	The staff at Giles Nursery and Infants’ school have a deep understanding of their school’s context and the families they serve. Through a multi-layered approach, they are able to offer finely tuned support to meet the needs of pupils and parents. Key to this success is strong distributive leadership, nurturing relationships and exemplary levels of communication. Despite the substantial challenges of the past year, staff have been determined to remain connected to their community through the innovative use of digital technology and more traditional routes of doorstep visits, telephone calls and letters home. Staff identify precise barriers to children’s learning and tailor bespoke strategies to overcome them which involves parents at every stage. Support offered to families is based on embedded school values such as love, positivity, respect and friendship and therefore parents trust the school and levels of satisfaction are very high.

Although this visit may draw on the deep dive methodology published by Ofsted in ‘Inspecting the curriculum’, the visit’s length and content limits the number of subjects which can be explored. Consequently, there is insufficient evidence to draw firm conclusions about the systemic aspects of the school’s work. However, hypotheses are likely to arise which leaders may wish to pursue as part of their

ongoing self-evaluation. Similarly, where the HIP makes subsequent visits to the school, they may follow up these hypotheses by exploring other subjects alongside school leaders.

Summary of agreed actions	By whom	By when
▶ For leaders to consider the aspects of remote teaching and learning to retain following lockdown (Covid Keeps).	Senior leaders	Summer term

Date and focus of next visit	Date	Focus
	06.05.2021	Summer visit with SEF focus

Hertfordshire Improvement Partner: *Carole Hinstridge*

Date: 18.03.2021

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