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Ms Harriet Price
Headteacher
Homerton Early Years Centre
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Dear Ms Price

Short inspection of Homerton Early Years Centre

Following my visit to the school on 19 May 2016, 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 outstanding in March 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. A member of staff described the school as 'a magical place to work'. This feeling is echoed by other staff and by parents, and is shown very clearly in children's responses to their school. You are an outstanding and inspirational leader whose vision of how you want the school to be is crystal clear and whose commitment to every individual child in the school is unquestionable.

Since the last inspection, the provision for two-year-olds (known as The Nest) is no longer separately registered and is now part of the school. The provision is fully integrated with the rest of the school and is of a similar high standard. You have ensured that staff receive the same training as other nursery staff and that expectations are equally high. The integration of the school and the children's centre is highly effective. This means that vulnerable children are identified early through contact with their families and are brought into The Nest as early as possible. This gives them an excellent head start in developing the skills that they will need, in due course, when they become of statutory school age.

You have been instrumental in creating a community childcare hub. This has enabled local private, voluntary and independent settings to work with you, as a maintained nursery school, to develop their practice. The local authority recognises the hub as an example of excellent practice and is using the model you have created to extend joint working more widely. There is a great deal of anecdotal

evidence of the effectiveness of the hub, but only one setting has yet been re-inspected since joining it; its overall effectiveness improved from good to outstanding.

The school has tackled the areas for improvement from the last inspection very well. The provision for children's physical development has improved both in terms of the resources that are available and the school's approach to this area of the curriculum. In addition to a wealth of appropriate activities for children to choose from themselves, you now also ensure that physical development is taught directly through a range of adult-led activities. For example, during the inspection we observed a member of staff working with a small group of children to develop their hand-eye coordination. The task was well chosen and the children were very keen to try to keep their balloon in the air by tapping it with their bat.

The outdoor areas are very well developed in both the nursery and The Nest. Children are given excellent opportunities to develop their physical strength, their coordination and their fine motor skills. For example, during the inspection we watched an adult working with a small group to pick up 'slippery beans' from a tray using tweezers. The activity was fun and enjoyable, requiring a great deal of skill. The children showed great perseverance and were able to be successful, with the support and encouragement of the member of staff.

As part of their physical development, the school actively teaches children to manage risk. You do not seek to make the environment risk free, but instead think carefully about where risks could be introduced as teaching and learning opportunities. For example, staff have placed a full-sized enamel bath and a child-sized ladder in The Nest garden. Children are given the opportunity to learn to climb safely, under the supervision of adults. Similarly, in the nursery garden, you have not banned children from rolling down the hillocks on wheeled equipment. You simply teach children how to do so safely and to look out for moving objects in that area of the garden. The transferable skills that children learn through these sorts of activities, in terms of keeping themselves safe in everyday life, are obvious.

The school communicates very well with parents and provides a wealth of information on how they can support their children's learning at home. Parents are universally supportive of the school, and many told me how lucky they feel that their child goes to Homerton. They very much appreciate the range of opportunities that the school offers, and many talked about how the staff go 'above and beyond' what could reasonably be expected. Parents were very keen to talk about the recent 'We're going on a bear hunt' day and how much they had enjoyed sharing the experience with their children.

Parents greatly appreciate the school's very open culture and they feel well supported by staff. Several parents spoke to me about their individual experiences of being supported by staff, both in terms of their children and on a personal level. For example, one parent spoke of her feelings of desperation about an aspect of her child's behaviour at home. She described movingly how her child's teacher had supported her and provided practical solutions which resolved the problem. This feeling of being part of a caring and supportive family was a recurring theme

throughout my conversations with parents. It is clearly something that parents find enormously valuable, and this is reflected in the fact that 100% of parents who responded to Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire) said that they would recommend the school to others.

Governance is effective, and there are a number of governors with educational knowledge and understanding who lead the governing body effectively. However, some governors are new to their roles and do not yet have the necessary knowledge of 'The school inspection handbook' that would enable them to make evaluations that are based on clear criteria rather than on 'gut feeling'.

Governors are currently seeking to recruit a new headteacher to succeed you on your retirement. They are fully aware of what this entails and are taking advice appropriately from the local authority. Governors understand that it is vital that standards are not allowed to slip during this transition period and that the school's very well established position as an outstanding provider is maintained.

Safeguarding is effective.

The safety and well-being of children is your highest priority at Homerton. You and the school's staff know the children and their families very well. The combination of a highly vigilant approach combined with an open and welcoming atmosphere means that children are well protected. You are alert to possible concerns and families are more likely to share their concerns with you. You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and that records are detailed and of high quality.

As designated senior lead for safeguarding (DSL), you are both experienced and appropriately trained. You have ensured that there is good DSL coverage throughout the site and at all times by appointing a member of the staff in the extended care provision and in the children's centre as deputy DSLs. Both members of staff have received appropriate training to carry out their role.

Inspection findings

- You are an inspirational leader who continues actively to seek new challenges, both for the school and for yourself as an early years professional. You are recognised widely for your knowledge and expertise, and have presented to a Department for Education select committee on the effective integration of nursery schools and children's centres. The school is rightly recognised as a centre of excellence, and early years practitioners and other specialists visit frequently to develop their own practice. The school is already part of two teaching school alliances and, from September, will start to provide initial teacher training directly.
- The staffing in the nursery has remained largely unchanged since the last inspection. Staff love working at Homerton and are dedicated to its ongoing development. You have ensured that continual professional development for staff means that the long-term stability of staffing is very positive for the

school, rather than a recipe for staleness. Staff continually seek to improve their practice and to ensure that they keep up to date with developments in early years teaching.

- The Nest provides an excellent environment for two-year-olds. The classroom and the garden are well thought out and meet the needs of very young children very well. For example, furniture is all of the right size and is well designed. Resources are suitable for children's stage of development and are stored at appropriate heights. A well-resourced changing area offers an appropriate degree of privacy, and the ladder to the changing platform adds interest for children to this often mundane task.
- The early years pupil premium is spent very effectively. You use the funding for a range of purposes to suit the individual needs of children. Staff focus very well on developing children's communication, social and emotional skills through, for example, the skilled use of questioning during activities. As a result, disadvantaged pupils make excellent progress and are in a much better position to be ready for their statutory schooling as a result of their time at Homerton.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the transition to new headship arrangements is smooth and that the school's outstanding provision is maintained and built on during this time
- newer governors strengthen their knowledge and understanding of 'The school inspection handbook', in order that all governors have a clear, strategic understanding of the school's strengths and where it could still be improved.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cambridgeshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the assistant headteacher, other members of staff, a group of governors and a representative of the local authority. I spoke with parents as they brought their children to school and considered the 20 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. I observed teaching and learning, jointly with you, throughout the school and in the provision for two-year-olds. I looked at a range of school documents, including the school's single central record of staff recruitment checks.