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Mrs Carol Lister  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Lister

### **Short inspection of Slade Nursery School**

Following my visit to the school on 6 July 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 your school was judged to be outstanding in February 2013.

### **This school continues to be outstanding.**

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Since the previous inspection, and following the previous headteacher leaving in July 2014, the school has undergone a period of change. From September 2014, the deputy headteacher took on the role of acting headteacher and subsequently left in July 2015. The local authority acted promptly, determined to ensure that high standards remained the status quo. Consequently, you were seconded, in part because of your expertise as a local authority early years lead teacher, to the role of acting headteacher. Since your appointment in September 2015, you have directed the school superbly, rising to the challenges that unsettled times can convey and preserving stability. Your vision is crystal clear to all those associated with the nursery. Top of the list is meeting the needs of the community well and providing the best start possible to children's education. You have overhauled systems for gathering performance information, ensuring you are well informed about how well children are learning and developing their skills. You use the information you gather to ensure that the school is continually improving. Your mantra of 'There are always things we can do better' is highly evident in your thorough and determined approach. Consequently, a forward-thinking ethos pervades, rooted firmly in the needs of each individual child.

Standards remain high. Many children start school with skills and understanding below those typical for their age. Approximately 50% of children speak English as an additional language and many start school with lower communication, language and literacy skills than are typical of their age. The majority of children, including those at an early stage of speaking English, end their nursery year with skills typical of their age in all areas of learning. This represents rapid progress.

Staff work exceptionally well together and are determined to play their part well in achieving the highest possible standards. Consequently, they too see themselves as learners, eager to enhance their skills further. They support one another and work exceptionally closely with staff from Wood Farm Primary School, the Day Nursery and Slade and Headington Children's Centre – all of whom share the same site, including the communal outdoor learning area. This collaborative approach works seamlessly and benefits the diverse needs of children and their families.

At the time of the previous inspection, leaders were asked to ensure that the next phases of the school's building project were managed effectively so that children's achievement was maintained and further enhanced. The building project was completed successfully and now, some time on, the site remains exceptionally well maintained and fit for purpose. You have insisted that additional development is necessary in order to enhance children's outdoor learning experiences further. Consequently, the outdoor area has had a makeover. Your attention to detail is first rate. For example, in some areas you considered the gradient of slopes, so as to maximise opportunities to strengthen children's physical development appropriately. As a result, the outdoor area is safe and appealing and meets children's developmental needs extremely well.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The well-being and safety of children is of high priority. You and the staff know the children and their families very well. You carefully orchestrate joined-up thinking with staff from all the providers who share the site. This means that families who, from time to time, require additional support are promptly put in touch with the appropriate personnel, including those staff who work at the children's centre.

All staff are clear on the school's policies and procedures. Care is afforded to ensuring that first aid, personal care and medication policies are up to date and procedures are clear. Families are well supported in this aspect.

Leaders ensure that all checks are undertaken appropriately on adults' suitability to work with children. Staff receive appropriate training, including that relating to the government's 'Prevent' duty. This means staff are alert and respond appropriately if concerns arise.

### **Inspection findings**

- You display high levels of care for the children who attend the nursery school. You are determined that children get off to a cracking start, enjoying learning experiences wholeheartedly, in a caring and nurturing environment.

You know individual children's needs inside out. You ensure that the provision is continually evolving in order to meet the needs of each child exceptionally well. Part of the school's success is down to your belief that 'There are always things we can do even better'.

- Staffing has changed considerably since the last inspection. You are proud that staff are enthused by their work and are passionate about working in the early years. They share your high levels of commitment and are dedicated to the school's ongoing development.
- You have strengthened the school's systems for tracking children's progress. Using this information well, you identify precisely where children are at risk of slipping behind. This allows you, ably supported by the school's special educational needs coordinator, to provide extra support to improve outcomes for specific children. As a result, all children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make at least good and often rapid progress.
- You make excellent use of performance information and other checks to ensure that the nursery continues to provide an outstanding education. For example, when you noticed that some children were making slower progress in developing communication skills you looked forensically, asking searching questions. Because of your probing analysis, you noticed that children's grasp of rhythm and rhyme was developing more slowly than other aspects of communication. You promptly sought a music specialist to work alongside staff on developing this aspect. Children now enjoy exploring rhythm with a variety of percussion instruments when sharing stories with their key workers. As a result, progress in this aspect of communication is highly evident and rapid.
- Trusting relationships between parents, staff and children permeate the school's day-to-day activities. The tone is set from the word go, with all families greeted warmly each day by the school receptionist. Children then settle quickly into their morning routines because their key worker engages their interest from the outset. Parents are free to stay as long as they wish, although, in most cases, minimal time is required because children settle so quickly and confidently.
- Parents speak very positively about the care their children receive. There are high levels of satisfaction, particularly about how well the school caters for each individual child. One parent commented: 'This nursery is perfect. My child always wants to come'. Children quickly develop high levels of confidence and independence.
- Adults are highly skilled. Children are ready to respond to questions such as 'How do you know?' or 'What could you try next?' Children make rapid progress because adults engage in conversation, structuring children's learning skilfully.
- Teachers plan activities thoughtfully, ensuring that they appeal to children's interests and meet their next learning steps well. A wealth of high-quality outdoor learning activities, including those that promote children's physical, communication and creative development, are prominent in every session. The outdoor environment contains tempting zones including a mud kitchen and den building area. You are determined that children receive memorable experiences and learn equally well through play or more structured

activities.

- When many children join the school, they struggle to communicate as well as most three-year-olds. Staff promote the acquisition of language superbly well, prioritising the development of children's communication skills. Activities promote speaking and listening and adults are highly skilled at moving on children's learning. For example, children confidently deepened their understanding of positional language when mapping key features from a recent visit to Child Beale Park in Lower Basildon. They could confidently use terms such as 'next to', 'close by' and 'behind' to describe the location of key features. Adults skilfully encourage children to consolidate or expand on their vocabulary choices and, consequently, children make terrific progress.
- Many children start school with mathematical skills and understanding below those typical for their age. Leaders are keen to ensure that teachers plan activities that promote number development. During the inspection, children played hopscotch enthusiastically and were able to associate the number name with its representative digit. However, you have noticed number opportunities are less prevalent in children's day-to-day menu of activities. When we discussed this aspect, you agreed that mathematical development could be encouraged more, particularly through the provision of activities that encourage children to develop secure counting skills more rapidly.
- Children are encouraged to mark make regularly, using a host of appropriate materials. For example, children enjoyed recalling the places that they had visited on a recent school trip, drawing a map to show the places they had visited. Children make rapid progress, giving meaning to the marks they make as they draw, write and paint.
- You are determined to provide plentiful and relevant training opportunities for all adults. In return, your staff are also determined to be the best practitioners they can be. This high level of ambition at all levels is infectious. A wide range of training is available and matched well to adults' needs. For example, you are fastidious in providing meaningful opportunities for those at an early stage of their career, or those transitioning into early years practice for the first time, or those who simply want to become even better.
- Children's learning journeys are of the highest quality. Staff take pride in recording detailed observations of children and the small but significant steps they take in their development. Learning journeys pay regard to all aspects of learning in equal measure. There are stunning examples of children's achievements in art, mark making and number work. Testimony to their quality is that the reader knows each child inside out by the time they have reviewed their learning journey. Adults are expert at capturing every little detail. Parents too appreciate the high quality of the school's assessments of their child's development.
- Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are catered for extremely well. The special educational needs coordinator has ensured that families have regular access to a variety of support such as speech and language therapy, paediatric advice and educational psychology support. Some children who require additional support benefit from highly skilled support assistants who understand their learning needs well.
- The curriculum is enhanced by regular visits, such as to the Oxford Botanical

Gardens. Adults maximise the benefits, taking every opportunity to develop children's communication and develop a strong sense of the world around them. Staff say that even the journey provides a chance to talk about passing landmarks such as the city's university, sparking children's curiosity and broadening their horizons.

- Children get along well with one another. They know how to take turns, share and listen to one another. When children react inappropriately, adults are quick to offer guidance and explain what is expected. Consequently, there are very few unsettled moments. Staff and children ensure that Slade Nursery School is a very happy place to be.
- Governors know the school well and share your vision wholeheartedly. They are determined that families in the local area receive the support they need. Governors have paved a smooth transition towards federation status from September. Collaborative working is well underway and governors meet regularly with their counterparts from the primary school working together well, including on safeguarding matters, to provide a coherent service for families in the local area.
- The local authority knows the school well. In part, exceptionally high standards have been maintained because of officers' determination to support leaders well during the recent period of change.
- Parents are confident in the school and freely offer praise. Parents readily complete informal feedback, noting the many activities their children enjoy while at the school. Families, including those who have recently moved to the United Kingdom, feel warmly welcomed and secure because of the warmth of the staff.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- adults plan high-quality opportunities for children to reinforce mathematical language and ideas in order for children to consolidate key skills such as counting on or back.

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

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Farr  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you, two governors, including the chair of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I observed learning in both classes for the whole of the morning session, jointly with the headteacher. I scrutinised children's

learning records and teachers' planning documents. I spoke to parents as they arrived. There were too few responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, to be considered. I analysed a range of school documentation, including information about children's achievement, the school improvement plan and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. We discussed your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness.