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Ms Janet Ackers
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Dear Ms Ackers

Short inspection of Gamesley Early Excellence Centre

Following my visit to the school on 18 October 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 June 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have ensured that there is no sense of complacency whatsoever in all that you and your staff do. Despite the highly positive features identified at that time, you and your staff look continually for any aspect, however small, that you can adjust, if the result is likely to provide children with an even better education.

As a former senior advisor with the National Strategies Early Years, and a current local authority leader in education, you have a deep understanding of effective teaching. You match this with a highly accurate knowledge of all aspects of your school's provision, along with the outcomes for the children who attend. You and your governing body set these out in a detailed self-evaluation document that gives compelling reasons why Gamesley Early Excellence Centre continues to be outstanding.

Your team are highly motivated and hold you in deep respect. During my visit, I received a large number of responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire, from staff in a wide variety of roles. These gave, with the most minor of exceptions, highly positive responses in all aspects. Staff I spoke to during my visit told me how closely they work together to learn from each other, along with how you support them all to develop their skills and expertise, using excellent continuing professional opportunities. As a result, your staff are highly trained, knowledgeable and

exceptionally committed to providing the best and most inspiring teaching for every child.

At the last inspection, inspectors asked the governing body to improve their monitoring of the school's development plan. Governors wasted no time in placing this as a standing item on all sub-committee meetings. They then ensured that, when visiting the school frequently, they ask searching questions to check continually that each item for action on the plan happens on time, and that its impact is as intended. Governors are, rightly, proud of their very effective strategic role in securing the school's continuing success.

Teaching is of an exceptional quality. Children quickly settle in because they see that staff care deeply about them, and are greatly interested in their ideas and views. This excellent modelling by adults means that children, in turn, become respectful to both adults and to each other. Staff miss no opportunities to make learning highly interesting. As a result, children sustain their attention and are hungry to learn as much as possible. During my visit, I saw no instances of children distracting others, or being disengaged in any way from what they were doing.

Children who are two years old are given particularly close supervision. For example, during my visit, I saw adults helping a small group of children to play the roles of patients and doctors. Children were cooperating happily. Staff used the activity to ask children questions that made them think hard. Staff asked, for example, 'What do you think this patient needs because he's poorly?' Children suggested that he should be given blankets to keep him warm and that he also needed taking to the hospital quickly. They could explain why they these would be good actions if someone was very ill. Good questioning by staff in all areas of the school means that children learn quickly to both listen and to communicate effectively.

Staff also take great care to help children make links between different ideas. For instance, during my visit I observed a teacher reading 'Handa's surprise' with a group of children. With the aid of a globe, she skilfully helped children to understand the different parts of the world, their climates and geography, along with comparing houses in Africa with those the children lived in themselves. In the same session, the children also used oranges to develop an early skill of estimating, and practised counting backwards as they unclipped pegs and labels from a small washing line. This lively and highly stimulating approach, complemented by many exciting visits to, for instance, Chinatown in Manchester, makes learning for children come alive. I also saw how staff use the outdoor area's 'mud kitchen' to extend learning from the visits children make to the 'forest school' by, for example, making a magic potion together. As a result of highly effective and exciting teaching, children flourish.

You and your staff have created a bespoke assessment system that is highly detailed and that they update continually. The judgements that your staff make of each child's abilities are fully accurate. They allow staff to plan challenging work which is precisely matched to children's needs. Those children who need to catch up are given comprehensive, systematic and highly effective support to build their skills

and confidence. Staff give children who are the most-able continual opportunities to extend their understanding and skills to high levels.

A large majority of children enter the school with skills that are below those typically found in children of the same age. However, they make rapid progress. As a result, by the time that they leave, almost all children are in line with, or are above, the expectations for their age. This includes those children who are disadvantaged and children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. An examination of children's 'learning journeys' that I made during my visit confirms that the progress of children is substantial. School information, and historic records, show that this rate of progress has been sustained for different cohorts of children over successive years.

You currently give valuable support to headteachers and teachers in other settings in order to help them improve what they do. However, you agree that there is good potential to enhance this. You are in the early days of forming a teaching school alliance with other schools. Rightly, you believe that this would offer more teachers from other schools, where children do not yet make outstanding progress, to come to see the highly effective teaching at Gamesley Early Excellence Centre for themselves.

Unsurprisingly, you have the very strong support of parents, who feel they are close partners in their children's learning. All those who responded to Parent View, along with those who submitted comments, were highly positive in all aspects. They praised both your leadership and both the quality and dedication of staff, and explained how this ensured that their children make rapid progress. One response summed up the view of others by stating, 'My daughter is thriving at this nursery. She looks forward to her days there and comes home full of enthusiasm about what she has learned. The staff are excellent at supporting her development, both educationally and emotionally. I couldn't have wished for a better start for her.'

Safeguarding is effective.

There is an extremely impressive culture of vigilance at the school. Staff, who are all very well trained, are highly attuned to notice the various warning signs that indicate that a child could be being harmed. Their willingness to report to you any concerns they have, however slight, is clear. Staff I met explained that they would not hesitate to use the school's procedures to inform you instantly of any suspicions they might have. Each learning area in the school has a box with very useful and detailed guidance and procedures for safeguarding. All staff must confirm in writing that they have read, and understand, all relevant policies, which are very thorough and fully up to date.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of very high quality. You make brisk referrals to a range of external agencies, including social care, and are unafraid to escalate your concerns if you believe that the responses of those agencies are insufficient. You aim to work as closely as possible with parents in all circumstances.

The highly positive and warm professional approach that your staff have ensures that children feel at ease and very safe at the school, and are able to tell staff if they feel worried about anything. Staff also warn them very well, in ways that are

appropriate for their age, about dangerous things. For example, children are told why they should not run indoors, how to walk safely on pavements when on school trips, and the importance of washing their hands before eating food. As a result, children develop a very good understanding of how to keep themselves safe, and behave in very safe ways in school.

Inspection findings

- You set the highest of expectations, both for the quality of teaching at the school and the rates of progress you insist that all children must make. You ensure that this is achieved by continual monitoring and by giving staff excellent opportunities to further develop their skills.
- Staff are highly reflective, undertaking many projects, including action research, to become even better wherever they can in delivering the best education for children. However, the opportunities for staff from other schools to see this excellent practice for themselves are not yet as well developed as they could be.
- Governors are highly effective in their strategic role and have an excellent knowledge of the school. They consider their own skills carefully and seek out new governors who can bring additional expertise.
- Your monitoring records show convincingly why you have judged teaching outstanding over time. These records show that teachers have very clear skills, highly effective practice, use good questioning, plan carefully and consistently deliver engaging lessons that move children on rapidly.
- Staff ensure that their assessments are fully accurate by moderating their judgements in detailed meetings with a variety of other schools, and through discussions with the local authority.
- At least two in three pupils enter the school with levels of skills that are below those typically found in children of the same age. Upon entry, almost no children have levels of skills that are above those found typically.
- By the time they leave, 97% of pupils have skills that are at least in line with the expectations for their age. Around one third of children have skills above this, with almost half having higher skills in mathematics. School information shows that the rate of children's progress also accelerates over time, as children's confidence increases.
- Leaders ensure that the early years pupil premium is spent highly effectively, so that disadvantaged pupils make rapid progress from their starting points.
- Children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have starting points that are particularly low. However, the care and education for these children is exceptionally effective, so that by the time they leave, almost all are achieving broadly in line with, or above, the levels expected for their age.
- The coordinator for these pupils ensures that they are fully included in activities and that no discrimination exists at any point. For example, staff teach all children Makaton signing because, though it has the greatest impact in improving confidence in those children with less secure verbal skills, all children can share a system of communication together.
- Staff give the most able pupils particularly challenging work, especially to develop their skills in reading, writing and mathematics. These pupils make

substantial progress and, on exit, their attainment is approximately one year ahead of other pupils nationally.

- Staff compile detailed records of each child's developments in a 'learning journey'. These records, overall, confirm that the progress of children is rapid. They record with great accuracy the improvements that children make over time.
- Staff ensure that children develop an early pleasure and excitement of books. During my visit, I saw children able to describe the story they were reading with an adult, and predict what would happen next. The most able children were reading independently, and self-correcting any errors they made.
- Children are extremely well behaved. The school's behaviour policy is applied consistently and is matched with a caring and considerate approach from staff. As a result, children do not need to be reminded regularly to behave but, despite their young age, largely manage their own behaviour. They are polite to other children and to adults, and get on exceptionally well together.
- Though their attendance is not compulsory, children are very keen to come to the nursery to learn. School records show that attendance is currently 95%, and has been rising consistently since the last inspection.
- The achievement of children across the different areas of learning, together with their highly positive attitudes to learning, mean that they are very well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Highly successful strategies engage parents in their children's learning. You ensure that parents are given detailed and regular updates of their child's progress, as well as very effective support to help their children learn at home.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The website is highly attractive and informative, supplying parents and visitors with valuable information about the curriculum, photographs of the many activities children undertake, news, and useful safeguarding advice and links.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to develop opportunities for teachers from other settings to improve their skills by visiting the school to see highly effective teaching for themselves.

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

Yours sincerely

Roary Pownall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

My inspection focused upon a number of key lines of enquiry. These were:

- whether the areas for improvement, identified at the last inspection, had been fully addressed
- whether the quality of teaching remained outstanding for all children, including those of children who are two years old, and children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- examining the rate of progress of children across the different areas of learning in the early years
- investigating the quality of leadership and management in the school, particularly in respect of performance management and including the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures.

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, representatives of the governing body, and other members of staff in different roles. We visited all areas of the school that offer provision for children who are two years of age or older, in order to observe teaching and learning. I looked at children's work and evidence of their progress in their 'learning journey' files. I observed children's behaviour in lessons. I considered the views of 24 parents posted on Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, alongside the 20 parents who submitted comments to Ofsted's freetext facility and those of the school's most recent questionnaire. I read a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, your school development plan and information on outcomes for children currently in the school. I studied information related to attendance, anonymised examples of teachers' appraisal and examined safeguarding records and policies. I examined the school's website to check that it meets requirements on the publication of specified information. I considered recent and previous monitoring reports from the local authority, and held a telephone conversation with its senior advisor. I looked at the range of views expressed by staff, through Ofsted's questionnaire, about the school and its leadership. I observed as staff read books with children of different abilities, including the less able and the most able.