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Mrs K Clifford
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Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Clifford

Short inspection of The Ambleside Centre

Following my visit to the school on 23 November 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 December 2012.

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 the high standards achieved at the previous inspection have been maintained during a period of leadership change in the school. The highly inclusive ethos of the school ensures that all children are supported extremely well, whatever their needs may be. There is a very strong emphasis on making sure that all children achieve their potential, whatever their starting points. This is achieved through very positive relationships with parents, providing a wide range of high-quality resources for children to access during the school day and encouraging children to be independent in their learning. There is a very special culture within the school, providing nurture and support for each individual child, which reflects the school's values to achieve the best outcomes and well-being of children. As a result, children flourish and make outstanding progress during their time in nursery.

The previous inspection identified that, as an outstanding nursery school, you should develop partnership arrangements to share outstanding practice with the wider community. This has been achieved. You are a member of a teaching school alliance and you provide opportunities for staff from other schools to come and observe your excellent early years practice, and also provide training and support for other early years providers. The very high quality of provision in Meadows is recognised by the local authority and other schools and settings within the community.

Parents are an integral part of the school. You and your staff take time to find out what parents want for their child. The flexibility of your provision enables children to thrive and flourish. Highly effective relationships with parents are evident. One parent reflected: 'My daughter had the most brilliant start due to the home visit.' All parents who completed the online Parent View questionnaire were, without exception, fully supportive of the school. All would recommend the school to other parents. All parents agree or strongly agree that all aspects of the school's work meet the needs of their child and that the school is well led and managed. Your staff share information with parents on a daily basis. The learning journeys, which are developed to show children's achievements, are readily available for parents to look at and take home overnight if they wish. One parent said: 'I am proud of the reports I had of my son's development, all backed up by his learning record which we took home to spend more time reading.' Parents are actively encouraged to share in the assessments of their child's learning by adding contributions of their child's achievements at home.

You are not complacent. You and your staff are keen to ensure that the best outcomes are achieved for all children. Involvement in the projects linked to the early years pupil premium, boys' writing and 'early talk boost' is a testament to the school's commitment to continually improve provision for children. As a result, children with limited language on entry to the nursery make outstanding progress in their language skills. The introduction of 'writing on the move bags' provides more opportunities for children to write and make marks both inside and outside the setting. Children are enthusiastic about writing and are eager to share their writing with each other.

The school's commitment to equality of opportunity means that all children achieve exceptionally well. This includes pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those in receipt of early years pupil premium funding. The progress of these groups of pupils in particular was a line of enquiry during this inspection, particularly since, at the time of the previous inspection, there was no funding for disadvantaged children in the early years. Your own records of children's progress demonstrate the highly effective work being done by your staff to meet the learning needs of all groups of children. Senior leaders meticulously track the progress of all children. This enables teachers and key workers to identify any areas of children's learning that lag behind. Additional support and interventions are swiftly put in place to enable children to catch up.

The new special educational needs coordinator is diligent in her recording of children's progress and development. She has introduced additional checks to measure small steps in progress to demonstrate the necessity for additional funding for some children with learning difficulties. The most able children are provided with additional challenge to boost their learning, which enables them to make rapid progress. You and your staff are fully aware of the learning needs of all children, including the most able disadvantaged children, because time is taken daily in key worker groups for each adult to spend time with their group of children and target the specific needs of the children in their group. This ensures that their

responsibilities for the learning, progress and well-being of children are fulfilled exceptionally well.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Safeguarding is at the heart of the school's work. The well-being of children is a top priority. School leaders have been involved in a project to support and improve children's well-being. All adults demonstrate a strong understanding of how to ensure that children are kept safe. Daily checks on school equipment are designed to identify issues quickly. Key workers carry out risk assessments in all areas of the garden and outdoor space.

Children are taught how to keep safe while using school equipment, for example children using the trail set up in one of the indoor classrooms showed a good understanding of how to land when they jumped off the humped bridges. Before eating snacks, children know that they need to wash their hands. Adults regularly check that they have done this when they arrive to enjoy fruit and a drink when the snack bar is open. They are also supported to understand about keeping safe when using the internet. Children learn how to keep safe in the community and when crossing roads. Effective use is made of the local community support officer to help children to develop a strong understanding of how to keep safe on the way to and from school. The outside area is sometimes set up with roads and crossing points for children to use, particularly with the bikes and trikes.

The governing body ensures that all staff are suitably trained at the correct level and are provided with regular updates relating to safeguarding. All staff are required to read part 1 of 'Keeping children safe in education'. This ensures that staff are aware that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. When concerns arise, school leaders make effective use of other agencies to provide support and help to vulnerable families.

Inspection findings

- Your relentless focus on inclusion and promoting children's independence means that all groups of children make exceptional progress. They are very well prepared for learning in Reception classes when they leave the school.
- Every opportunity is used to check children's understanding. Children enjoyed crafting dough to make 'cakes' with cutters and tools. During this child-initiated activity, adults checked children's understanding of counting, reinforcing the importance of saying one number name for each 'cake'.
- You make effective use of additional funding for disadvantaged children. You were partners in a project to develop staff skills and ensure that disadvantaged children, including the most able disadvantaged children, made as much progress as other children. This project was successful, particularly in increasing the children's use and understanding of language.
- Staff have a detailed knowledge and understanding of each child's learning

needs. This is because they take time to get to know each child's interests, skills and ideas. Strong relationships underpin learning. Children happily select resources to use and adults sensitively guide children's thinking. During one discussion, the adult checked children's understanding of animals and their features by using a display to focus children's thoughts and ideas.

- Resources are organised extremely well. Children are able to select the activities that interest them as well as working with other children in groups during adult-led activities. Children were enthused and excited during an exploration of the cornflour and water paste tray, enjoying the sensation of the liquid and solid nature of the substance. The adult developed the children's language very effectively by devising suitable questions and using description to extend children's vocabulary. Children displayed high levels of sustained concentration, which made a strong contribution to their progress during this high-quality learning experience.
- Routines and systems are extremely well established. Children settle into learning as soon as they arrive in nursery. They plan their learning, enjoy the activities they plan to do and are able to reflect on their learning at the end of the session. Adults take time to make sure children know what is happening throughout the day. The effective balance of child-initiated activities, adult-led activities and times when children learn together in their key worker groups provides a good balance of learning opportunities. During the transitions from one part of the day to another, familiar music is played to signal to children to begin to put away the resources and prepare for a new focus. Children respond to this extremely well, and independently return resources to their correct place and settle quickly to the next activity.
- Children's behaviour is exemplary. They are calm, self-assured and confident learners. During one activity, a small group of children shared their ideas well, took turns and helped each other to construct models successfully. Even when children find sharing some resources difficult, adults gently intervene by encouraging children to consider for themselves how any conflict can be resolved. This supports children's personal development extremely well. They think carefully about what they can do and settle quickly again into the activity and their learning.
- Children understand how to keep themselves safe. They know that they need to wash their hands before eating any food and after using the toilet. They are careful in their play and considerate to one another. Children access their snacks and are able to use the bathrooms independently.
- Children are provided with opportunities to learn about their own culture and the culture of other children in the school. Effective use of different religious celebrations helps children to develop mutual respect for one another and an understanding and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. Children understand right and wrong, and understand about making choices during their planning, play and reviewing of their activities. They display high levels of engagement and strong relationships with each other and with adults.
- Staff make detailed records of their observations of children's learning, which are used to devise next steps extremely well. Parents are very pleased to be able to

access their child's learning journey readily. This information is used to make assessments of children's learning over time and track their progress. You are considering revisions to the tools you use for assessment and recognise that a sharper focus on recording of achievements linked to each area of learning and age band will support staff and parents in determining children's progress more effectively day to day.

- Governors are very supportive of the school and know its strengths and the most important areas for development very well. They provide challenge to school leaders and check that planned actions have been achieved. Self-evaluation is insightful and accurate. You and the governing body have devised a suitable plan to support further improvements. Currently, the plan is not sharply focused on the impact it is expected to have on improving outcomes for children. As a result, it is not always clear whether the plan has achieved the expected improvements.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- records of observations are refined to link more closely to levels of achievement across the different areas of learning and enable staff and parents to recognise children's on-going progress
- the centre development plan is sharpened by including success measures for planned actions which link to impact on children's progress, so leaders can check that the changes made enable children to achieve even more.

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

Yours sincerely

Ann Henderson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The lines of enquiry developed during the preparation for this inspection were:

- the effectiveness of school leaders in keeping children safe
- whether teaching continues to be outstanding
- whether outcomes are outstanding for all groups of children, particularly children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged children, including the most able disadvantaged children

- how ambitious leaders and managers, including governors, are, given the change in leadership, and whether they have maintained the outstanding quality of education since the previous inspection.

I met with you, the Meadows leader, the special educational needs coordinator, staff, children, one governor and a representative from the local authority. I had a telephone conversation with one governor. I jointly observed learning in all areas, both inside and outside, with you. I looked at samples of children's learning journeys. I took into consideration the views of parents through the Parent View questionnaire and considered the comments that had been placed on this website by parents. I evaluated the accuracy of your self-evaluation as well as a range of other documentation. I checked the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding arrangements.