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Ms Emma Payne  
Headteacher  
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Berkshire  
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Dear Ms Payne

### **Short inspection of Blagrave Nursery School**

Following my visit to the school on 14 December 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 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 former headteacher's retirement in July 2014, the school has undergone a period of change. The management of a local children's centre reverted to direct local authority control and the school is no longer responsible for managing this. At the beginning of your tenure in January 2014, you contended admirably with unsettled times, dealing with the impact of falling pupil numbers, a diminishing budget and overstaffing issues. You have steered the school exceptionally well, never compromising the quality of education for the children it serves. You led the school purposefully, handling issues sensitively and making well-judged decisions to secure the long-term sustainability of the school. To that end, you restructured staffing, providing a more streamlined approach and ensuring greater continuity for parents and children. Because of your work, you have placed the school on firm foundations, ready to achieve even more. Rightly, parents appreciate your unwavering commitment and praise the nursery for the outstanding education it continues to deliver. Parents value the top-notch start your school affords its children. One parent encapsulated the views of many stating: 'Blagrave is a lovely school where in just one term my child has thrived. The school has a very warm atmosphere and you feel as though the teachers genuinely care about your child as an individual.'

You lead by example, teaching regularly and modelling what is expected. You are determined that 'we continue to challenge ourselves to do even better'. This school sees great promise in all of its children because staff share your high levels of ambition wholeheartedly. You have ensured that detailed plans are in place to take the school forward, rooted in your accurate view of the school's strengths and areas that need improvement. Recognising how much the school achieved last academic year, you have set targets that are even more challenging. The school's vision to be 'an inspirational, creative and exciting place where children learn together and grow as individuals' is at the forefront of your work. You are determined to aim high and ensure that children get off to the best possible start. Many children start school with skills and understanding below those typical for their age. The quality of teaching is outstanding. Consequently, the majority of children, including those at an early stage of speaking English and the disadvantaged, end their Nursery Year with skills typical of their age in all areas of learning and many exceed typical levels of development. As a result, standards remain consistently high.

Parents, carers and their children are welcomed personally each day by the headteacher. Children run into school eagerly, keen to get started on the day's activities. This is because they feel secure and have high levels of confidence in the adults who care for them. There is a strong emphasis on planning activities based on children's needs and interests. This contributes very effectively to children's outstanding achievement and enjoyment of learning. The vast majority of parents confirm that their children love school. One commented: 'My child loves attending Blagrove and he is well supported in his overall development. He asks me every day (including weekends) if he can go to Blagrove.'

At the time of the previous inspection, leaders were asked to refine their analysis of assessment information. You have implemented a new system, gathering information more regularly and accurately. Wisely, you noticed that in the past some children were unsettled on their first day and, as a result, staff did not have a representative view of each child's true capabilities. As a consequence, when children join, you now extend the time needed for staff to ascertain children's starting points accurately. As a result, assessment information is now more accurate than in the past. You and your governors are adept at analysing the performance of key groups closely, including boys, girls, those who speak English as an additional language and those who are entitled to support through the early years pupil premium grant. All children achieve well. You set ambitious targets for all groups of children, determined that all have an equal chance of success.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders ensure that all checks are undertaken appropriately on adults' suitability to work with children. Staff receive appropriate training and keep up to date with statutory guidance, including 'Keeping children safe in education' (2016). All staff are clear on the school's policies and procedures. This means that staff are alert and respond appropriately if concerns arise.

You and the staff know the children and their families very well. Leaders liaise closely with outside professionals, including social care, seeking advice when appropriate. Detailed record-keeping ensures that leaders build up a clear chronology of support for individual families. The well-being and safety of children is of high priority.

Working closely with governors, you have instigated much-needed improvement to the school building and site. Leaders have prioritised accessibility issues effectively, for example recently installing a disabled toilet. In addition, the recent redesign of the school's entrance area has ensured that all office staff now have clear oversight of the main entrance. Transition into the morning session is seamless. Adults are checked appropriately and parents are welcomed warmly, including by the headteacher. Children rush in enthusiastically, readily engaging in activities such as posting their Christmas cards. Children settle quickly because they know what is expected.

The outdoor area has also had a makeover. Tired, superfluous equipment such as the climbing frame and balance beam have been removed. As a result, the outdoor area is safe. Well-planned activities meet children's developmental needs well. Leaders are currently seeking funding to enhance this area further and make it even more appealing to children.

### **Inspection findings**

- All children make rapid gains during their time at Blagrove Nursery School. When children join, many have skills and understanding that are not as well developed as most three-year-olds. Most children make significant and sustained progress to reach levels of development above those expected for their age by the time they leave. Children are prepared extremely well for their transition into school at the beginning of their Reception Year.
- You have an absolute belief that all children deserve the best start, and getting the early years right is the key to enabling their future success. You use additional funding wisely to overcome potential barriers so that all children, including those who are eligible for the early years pupil premium funding, learn well. As a result, disadvantaged children make rapid progress, catching up quickly and leaving the nursery with the skills needed for success in their first year at school. Local authority information shows that the majority of disadvantaged children attending the nursery go on to achieve a good level of development at the end of their early years.
- There is a powerful approach to helping children, including the disadvantaged, to look, listen and share their thoughts. Family learning days, such as a recent pottery experience or the visiting farmyard animals day, provide families with a range of shared and memorable learning experiences. The school's enriched curriculum reflects your underlying commitment to ensuring equality for all. The children's outstanding achievement results in part from the excellent ways the school identifies opportunities to promote children's learning and then builds activities and experiences around these.

- Children who speak English as an additional language make excellent progress. They get off to a good start, quickly developing their communication and language skills because of highly skilled adult interaction. During my visit, you and I observed the teaching of phonics. The children responded well to familiar nursery rhymes such as 'Hickory Dickory Dock', developing their understanding of rhyming patterns. They joined in enthusiastically, chanting familiar refrains confidently. Children were able to anticipate the next phrase well and some were beginning to identify pairs of rhyming words confidently. The teacher's subtle emphasis of rhyming sounds such as 'dock' and 'clock' helped significantly in paving the way for the teaching of letters and sounds.
- Adults plan rich opportunities to develop children's mark-making, including activities such as scribing on the playground with large chinks, making special cards and writing about the animals children observed during a special visit. Children enjoy these activities. For example, during the inspection, children showed great delight when writing special messages to their families. They display high levels of confidence and eagerness to scribe, using their early writing skills very well to communicate effectively. Children make excellent progress and achieve well.
- Children achieve so well because they have such a wide range of opportunities to explore and express themselves. Embracing children's natural inquisitiveness, staff plan plentiful opportunities for children to find out for themselves, solve problems and explore new things. Adults plan activities thoughtfully, ensuring that children gain valuable first-hand technological experiences. During the inspection, children were able to talk about and explore sensory toys or operate a simple camera to take photos of displays in the classroom. As a result, children make rapid progress in their understanding of the world.
- A strong working partnership is forged with parents from the word go. Regular opportunities to be involved in their child's learning include popular family learning days. The school ensures that parents receive a wealth of information about how to support their child's learning. For example, parents are encouraged to enrich the current theme of celebration by enjoying activities at home, such as dancing along to festive music or making a card for a special person. Parents appreciate the high levels of communication and feel fully involved in their child's learning and development. They are extremely positive about the school's effectiveness. All parents said that they would recommend the nursery.
- You value the contribution of staff enormously and nurture their professional development. Staff are encouraged to pursue additional qualifications in order to improve further their skills and expertise. For example, this year, an early years practitioner is completing her initial teacher training and a teaching assistant has become a 'key worker'. You are rightly proud of the school's approach to staff development, ensuring that 'growing your own' qualified teachers is valued and prioritised. The performance management of staff could be further strengthened by setting more challenging performance targets for staff.

- Skilful interaction between adults and children is particularly effective at promoting rapid acquisition of language skills. For example, when reading a Christmas story, children joined in enthusiastically with an adult, counting the number of legs of animals in the story. Staff encourage children to talk actively about their learning, promoting the rapid development of children's skills and understanding.
- Staff nurture and support children in developing their social and communication skills well. As a result, children are able to make self-directed choices confidently. For example, when choosing to work outdoors, children were able to make decisions about putting on an extra layer in order to wrap up and keep warm. Children quickly develop their independence because of their refined decision-making skills.
- Children know routines and become increasingly independent, for example when washing their hands by themselves. They improve their physical skills quickly. For example, children confidently take up chalks to make marks, in preparation to start early writing. Outdoors, children move around safely, taking care to avoid bumping into others when using tricycles. Children display high levels of consideration for their playmates and there are hardly ever any fallings-out. Children's behaviour is outstanding.
- Staff understand the children so well because their checking and recording of children's progress is focused firmly on detailed day-by-day observations. Children respond well to adults' questions and are encouraged to explain how and why. They thrive on these positive interactions with one another and their key workers.
- Governors are highly committed and terrifically proud of all that the school has achieved. Testimony to governors' enthusiasm is the fact that many parent governors choose to stay as co-opted governors, long after their own children have left. Governors contribute significantly to setting the direction of the school and supporting the headteacher. They ask challenging questions and monitor the school's work closely. They also play their part in forging strong relationships with parents. Regular visits to the school and detailed analyses of the school's performance information sharpen the accuracy of the school's self-evaluation.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that :

- staff are set challenging targets through the school's performance management system.

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

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Farr  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, I looked closely at the quality of your leadership, the impact you have on teaching and learning, and the culture of safeguarding in your school.

I met with you, the chair of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I observed learning in all classes during both the morning session and the afternoon session, jointly with the headteacher. I spoke to parents as they arrived and considered 21 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I considered 10 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. I analysed a range of school documentation, including information about children's achievement, children's learning journeys, the school improvement plan and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. We discussed your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness.