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Mrs Leigh Davies
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Davies

Short inspection of Willow Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 26 January 2017, 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 October 2012.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your promotion to headteacher in January 2015, you have not been complacent and relied upon the outstanding legacy the school has over time. You, alongside your deputy headteacher and well-established, capable team, know the school very well, and have continued to develop a school which relentlessly prioritises the needs of young children.

Willow Nursery remains a school where individual children's needs are met extremely well. Despite many children joining Willow with skills and abilities lower than is typical for their age group, children make outstanding progress because you and your team focus on making sure that children who need to catch up in their learning do so, and quickly. Children are happy, confident and love attending their nursery school.

Your detailed and methodical approach to analysing the achievements of all children, and identifying where improvements are required, ensures that you, and staff, respond quickly to individual need. As a result of your scrupulous work, there is no chance of any child slipping under your radar. You and your team know the children exceptionally well. You are constantly reviewing the support provided so that you know the difference you are making to the children's progress. Consequently, children leave Willow Nursery School very well prepared for the next stages of their education.

The classrooms and outdoor areas continue to be inspiring and adventurous spaces for learning. Staff have high expectations in creating exciting opportunities for children to learn through play, investigation and exploration. Talented teamwork among staff, and excellent leadership, remain at the heart of the school's success, ensuring that the school sustains the outstanding provision it offers.

You and the governing body check that those children eligible for the early years pupil premium funding receive the teaching and support they need to catch up quickly. The 'Pupil Premium Champion' effectively plans and delivers additional help for disadvantaged children. As a result, these children gain confidence quickly, and they find it easier to access their classroom work to achieve well because they are provided with the skills to do so. Consequently, disadvantaged children make good progress from their entry points and are achieving well.

You acknowledge that attendance is an area that you are constantly working on. Due to their differing starting points, and as the children are not yet of statutory school age, attendance fluctuates. However, children enjoy coming to nursery school and you implement the same expectations as in other schools. For example, you do not authorise holidays during term time, and your systems ensure that families know how important it is for their children to attend school regularly. As a result, attendance is not a major concern for you, but you identify that it would be helpful to analyse trends in attendance over time so further support can be offered to families, thus securing even better regular attendance.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school's work. They believe the school is safe and well led, and all parents who responded to Ofsted's Parent View would recommend Willow Nursery to others. Parents appreciate the flexibility and consideration the school gives to working parents. They also value the opportunity to be involved in the school's work, so that they can support their children's learning, for example the participation during the recent 'walk in the dark' event, and the imminent 'bedtime stories' event. Parental views are well summarised by a parent saying:

'I have sent my child to this school since she turned two, and from day one have felt secure knowing she is safe, cared for and happy. The staff are amazing and very trustworthy. My child has grown in all areas and is now getting set up ready to move on to big school. I can't fault Willow or its staff.'

Safeguarding is effective.

The safety of children at Willow is paramount. You are the designated lead for safeguarding and oversee all the systems and processes in place. You make sure that all the appropriate statutory checks are undertaken. This ensures that all adults, including apprentices, are suitable to work with children. All staff have received the latest training in all aspects of child protection and have a thorough knowledge and understanding of how to keep children safe. This extends to the levels of supervision in all areas, including the two-year-old provision. Staff are appropriately qualified to work with the youngest children.

Staff make sure that children are well supervised and that the children learn how to keep themselves safe. For example, in the outside areas, the children know that a red symbol means the equipment is not safe to go on, and a green symbol lets them know it is safe to access. A child told me, 'I cannot go on that because it's wet and I might fall.' When asked how they know, the child pointed to the red symbol. These well-known and understood routines help keep the children safe in their environment, while developing their independence to do so by themselves.

You and the staff meet together regularly to discuss and share information about the children. These meetings enable you to respond quickly to any concerns, and to ensure that children and their families receive the support that they need.

Governors and leaders ensure that all safeguarding and welfare arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are detailed and kept securely. You identify that continuing to review the processes, and the regularity of external checks by governors and external agencies such as the local authority, will help to further endorse the good, effective work you are doing to keep children safe.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain whether the school remains outstanding, one of the areas I focused on was the transition in the change of leadership, and leadership capacity. In your relatively short time as headteacher, you have made sure that the outstanding standard of education has been sustained. This remains an unmistakably clear vision of giving children high-quality opportunities to learn and develop.
- An additional line of enquiry during this inspection was the effectiveness and rigour of the assessment systems in place. You have developed and refined very precise systems and procedures for assessing and checking on children's progress. These are rigorous and allow for no slippage in achievement for any group of pupils. Every child at risk of underachieving has a targeted plan. You and the deputy headteacher have a very astute insight into the provision required by all children. For example, you identify the most able, and individualised plans and support are in place. This meticulous practice ensures that you and your staff adapt teaching and provision to meet children's needs specifically and, as a result, rapid progress is made by all children.
- Teachers and key workers form very close and effective relationships with children quickly. This helps children to feel secure and become independent rapidly. As a result, children immediately are willing to try out new things, and confidently contribute to group discussions. For example, at the start of a group session, one child, without prompting, noticed that the picture on the book was of the three bears. The child immediately told the key worker what the book was about before the adult could introduce it. On another occasion, when asked what lazy means, a child responded, 'When you've got to get up, but you don't get up.'
- Another focus during the inspection was assessing the quality of teaching and learning to secure outstanding progress for children. Teaching provides children with lots of opportunities to learn, and use, essential skills. Teachers plan

effectively to offer open-ended activities which allow children to take their learning as far as they are able, and children have the increasing confidence to do this.

- When children work independently, adults skilfully listen and appropriately intervene to provide support, develop or deepen the children's learning experiences. The provision extends this, further preparing children for Reception by having a small amount of time dedicated to teaching the basic skills. Consequently, children are used to listening, focusing and using what they know in different contexts.
- Adults routinely observe and record children's progress effectively. Scrutiny of children's individual profiles shows that adults successfully record each child's achievements. Adults plan and set up activities that develop children's independence and curiosity. This contributes greatly to children being happy and the outstanding progress they make both academically and personally.
- Effective role modelling by leaders and experienced members of staff ensures that any new staff, including the apprentices, quickly adopt the same understanding of the process used to capture children's progress well. Staff model effective speech and language, and give children time to apply their skills in all their activities. During these tasks, adults succinctly and accurately assess children's levels of independence, knowledge and understanding. From this, adults carefully plan the next steps for each child, based on rigorous assessment. This has ensured that during their two years at the school, children continue to make outstanding progress.
- The quality of the provision for two-year-olds is as effective as the older children. Adults working with this group of children have an in-depth knowledge of how younger children learn, and they plan activities that appeal to the children's interests and effectively promote their enjoyment of learning.
- The individual skills of teachers and teaching assistants are used fully to continue the development and improvement of the school. You value the work of all staff and nurture their professional development. Staff are encouraged to improve their skills and expertise. Training and support for staff is a strength of the school. For example, the 'Two's project' provided a ten-week intensive programme for staff that, when evaluated, demonstrated the difference it made to teaching and learning. One staff member said that they were 'more reflective in my own work and have more knowledge about what makes an outstanding teacher, so children do even better.'
- Provision for children covers all of the aspects of the early years curriculum effectively. Children are immersed in opportunities to use their phonics, number and investigation skills. You spend a lot of time 'hands on', teaching and supporting the children. This ensures that you know what is going on, and that the quality and variety of the experiences the children receive is the best it can be.
- Your self-evaluation accurately reflects the school's work. Your evaluative approach to everything you implement supports you to identify areas to improve, and celebrate what is going well. For example, your 'review of the school year'

books provide you with an excellent overview of all stakeholders' views, including children, parents, governors and staff. Inspection evidence shows that this is not an exercise completed as a 'tick list' of things to do, but one that fully informs your next steps as a school. As a result, leaders' actions are always based on where the school is at, and therefore it continues to be very successful.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- external support is sought to verify the rigour of all systems and processes linked to safeguarding processes, to continue to maintain the current level of effectiveness
- opportunities to work with other nursery settings are taken advantage of to share effective outstanding practice
- attendance information is analysed so leaders identify patterns and trends over time that can be used to improve attendance further.

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

Yours sincerely

Tracy Fielding
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the visit, I met with you and your deputy headteacher. I also met with the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. Visits were made during the morning and afternoon sessions to the indoor and outdoor environments to observe children's learning. I considered 39 views of parents from Ofsted's online text service, the 40 responses to Ofsted's Parent View, and the school's recent parent surveys and evaluations of the academic year. I also took into account the 10 staff responses. I reviewed a range of Nursery documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and school development plan. I also scrutinised records of your checks to safeguard children, and records of children's progress and attainment.