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Mrs Sarah Baker
Head of Centre
West Exe Nursery School and Children's Centre
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Dear Mrs Baker

Short inspection of West Exe Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 30 March 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 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. You and your team are exceptionally committed to early years education and have continued to seek ways to develop the quality of teaching and care you provide. This work ensures that children get off to a great start in this exceptionally nurturing school.

Children rush to school with beaming smiles, happily splashing in puddles and giggling with their parents trailing behind them. Staff warmly welcome the children and their families as children separate from their parents often without a second glance back. You and your experienced staff know the children and families very well. Relationships are strong. Parents value the information they receive about their child's progress and speak highly about how well the dedicated staff know and nurture the children in their care. Consequently, parents continue to bring their children to the school even when they have moved out of area. Every parent who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and those who spoke to me, would recommend the school. One parent summed up the views of many others by describing the school as a 'friendly and welcoming school with an attentive staff and a fun atmosphere'.

You and your governors have an accurate understanding of the exceptional education your team provides and are justifiably proud. Despite governors' high level of satisfaction, they continue to challenge you. Complacency is not an option.

Since the previous inspection, you have expanded the Nursery's remit to include provision for two-year-olds. Children get off to a fabulous start in this nurturing and stimulating environment. They confidently make choices about their learning and sustain interest because activities are well matched to their needs. Children follow well-established routines that help them to settle quickly and develop self-belief. Children confidently make choices about their learning, for example independently putting their coats on when they choose to go outside.

You have successfully implemented the area for improvement identified in the school's previous inspection through the effective integration of information and communication technology into aspects of the school's work. Children select and use technology for different purposes. For example, they confidently operate hand-held tablets to take photographs of their writing and the models they make. Similarly, they successfully navigate remote-control cars around the circuits they design themselves. Staff have also embraced technology to capture children's developmental milestones through an online learning journal. Parents are encouraged to contribute to this journal. They spoke positively about this tool and said that 'staff help us to be partners in our child's learning'.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All staff are clear about the steps to take if they have concerns about a child's welfare. A particular strength is your multi-agency work. The school's close partnership with other professionals, such as health and social care, ensures that children who may be at risk, and their families, receive early support.

Your role as safeguarding lead across a local group of primary schools complements the effective culture of safeguarding both within and beyond your school. School recruitment and vetting procedures are thorough. Fire, health and safety checks are meticulous. Staff are assiduous in taking measures to ensure that the school site is a safe place to be.

Parents report that they feel that their children are exceptionally well looked after and cared for. They know that their children are kept safe and secure in school because of the thorough measures you have in place. In addition, although attendance is not statutory for Nursery-aged children, your team follows up any child's absence robustly and, if necessary, carries out visits to the child's home to check they are safe.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry focused on finding out how well you were maintaining the school's exceptional provision. Your inspirational leadership ensures that your team is continually seeking ways to enhance provision. Your lead teacher has applied her research outcomes from a national leadership programme to provide robust challenge and support for staff training. As a result, middle leadership has strengthened. All follow a rich culture of self-evaluation where high-quality training is the norm. Staff targets for improvement are aspirational. Staff apply their deep-rooted understanding of child development to ensure that each child develops across all areas of learning. Children flourish in this high-performing school because their interests are at the forefront of staff minds.
- The finely tuned plans of staff reflect an in-depth understanding of individual children's interests and skills. Consequently, they plan activities that motivate and engage children exceptionally well. Children sustain high levels of concentration for prolonged periods. They are eager, curious and show a wide-eyed delight in their discoveries. Staff interact sensitively with children to ensure that they enhance the child's learning without dominating. Children are encouraged to talk about their learning and they respond enthusiastically when asked challenging questions. Every child thrives in this sanctuary of learning.
- My second line of enquiry was to explore the way that you ensure that children, especially disadvantaged children, are making rapid progress. Staff are meticulous in their approach to tracking and checking children's progress. Your inclusive school ensures that children make exceptional progress from their different starting points. In particular, where children enter the school with weak skills in communication and language, staff waste no time. They swiftly assess children's needs and work closely with speech therapists to develop programmes to overcome children's difficulties.
- The involvement of the child's family is central to this work. Consequently, children make exceptional progress because of the seamless support between home, school and external services. Leaders make sure that every penny of additional funding is used to mitigate children's barriers to learning. As a result, the progress of disadvantaged children soars. The school's high emphasis on personal development supports children's resilience. Consequently, they persist when faced with a problem, are proud of their accomplishments and become avid explorers of discovery.
- The most able children are challenged well and so they thrive. For example, a strong focus on sound recognition supports early reading and writing skills. The rich reading environment and extensive opportunities to mark make enable children to gain an understanding of the written word as a way to communicate. Boys in West Exe Nursery buck the national trend. They achieve equally as well as the girls in their literacy development.

- Joint moderation sessions with other schools in your locality help staff to be alert to best practice and to share their expertise. Of particular note is the way you follow this high-quality staff development with closely matched transition activities when children move from the Nursery to primary school. Consequently, children's learning does not stall. In particular, you keep a close eye on those most vulnerable children. You continue to advise and support schools, linking them with appropriate agencies in an effort to make sure that children and their families receive the support they need.
- My final area of interest focused on the effectiveness of leaders in ensuring excellent parental communication. The school's website is limited and does not reflect the splendid work of the school. You have plans to address this. However, in part, this is because the school is information rich in other ways. For example, much information is now shared through the online learning journal.
- Your school's motto encapsulates your work: 'Cherishing children through empowering parents'. A particularly strong characteristic of West Exe Nursery School is the way in which staff engage parents in their child's learning. The strong relationships that staff work tirelessly to develop with families help parents to feel comfortable in approaching staff if they are unsure or have worries about their child's well-being. Staff nurture these relationships from an early stage, for example as early as when expectant mothers visit the school site to see the midwife. Consequently, parents are empowered. Staff support and shape parenting skills to meet children's developmental needs so that children blossom and have the very best start to their education.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that they:

- refine the information provided on the school's website so that it is more easily accessed by parents and other visitors.

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

Yours sincerely

Tracy Hannon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and your senior leaders. Your lead teacher and I spent time watching children develop their skills both indoors and outdoors. We explored children's online records of developmental milestones. We reviewed the information you use to check the individual progress of each child as well as scrutinising your overview of the progress of groups of children over time. I looked at safeguarding records and explored your recruitment and staff vetting procedures. I also held discussions with two members of the governing body as well as scrutinising governing body minutes of meetings. I took full account of the 12 responses to Parent View as well as the free texts received for the inspection. Furthermore, I met with parents at the beginning of the school day to ascertain their views of the school's work.