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Ms Nicola Hayden
Oliver Thomas Nursery School
Matthews Avenue
East Ham
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Dear Ms Hayden

Short inspection of Oliver Thomas Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 29 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 good in July 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You provide strong, supportive leadership to your staff. You motivate them to do the very best that they can for the children at Oliver Thomas. They are happy and proud to work at the school. You are well supported by governors, the deputy headteacher and other leaders. You have identified collectively the right priorities to continue to improve provision at the school.

You and your staff have created a nurturing learning environment for children. Children feel secure, happy and valued. As a result of this and the good teaching they receive, they make good progress in their learning across the curriculum.

Most parents speak very highly of the school. They recognise that there is 'a real community feel' about the school and they say that staff and leaders are always understanding and helpful. Parents appreciate the support and guidance that the school provides for them as well as for their children.

Governors are highly skilled in their roles. They support and challenge the work of the school in equal measure. Governors value greatly the improvements you have made to the school since taking up your post. They are reflective and seek external advice on how they can improve their skills of governance further. Governors hold leaders to account for spending and ask the right questions to make sure that children benefit from the school's financial decisions.

Leaders have supported staff effectively to address the areas for improvement

identified at the previous inspection. Staff have worked hard to make sure that spoken language is given a high priority in all learning activities. Staff model correct sentence construction for children. They ask questions and introduce new words to children to widen their vocabulary. This supports all learners, particularly those who are at the earliest stages of speaking English. Occasionally, staff do not explain the vocabulary they use fully and they do not give children the time or the opportunity to use the new words themselves. Sometimes staff accept children's answers too readily or repeat what they say. This means that there are opportunities missed to ask a further stretching question in order to develop children's reasoning skills or deepen their understanding.

The learning environment reflects all areas of learning well. Children enjoy playing and learning in the outdoor areas. Leaders recognise that the outside learning environment could be enhanced further by providing more opportunities for children to apply their early reading, writing and number skills.

Children make good progress in early literacy and numeracy skills because they benefit from good teaching. This progress is reflected well in their 'special books'. However, classroom displays do not always celebrate children's achievement fully. Teachers do not display children's work consistently in a way that celebrates success and reminds children of the skills they used in order to be successful.

Staff have high expectations of what children can achieve in their learning about the sounds that letters represent and how sounds are blended together to make words. Leaders agree that staff would benefit from further guidance and training to ensure that activities are matched more closely to children's early phonics skills so that children make consistently strong progress.

The local authority values your work and commitment to sharing and developing practice in other schools in the local authority area. You have good plans in place to develop transition work further with your local primary school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and are of high quality.

Parents recognise that safeguarding children is at the heart of the school's work. You, the deputy headteacher and all staff are highly vigilant. You know your children well and quickly identify any changes to their well-being. Staff are swift to refer any concerns to you and action taken is rigorous and effective. You not only ensure that children at the school are kept safe but are also relentless in monitoring the safety of the children who leave the school, as well as their siblings. Your partnership working with the children's centre greatly benefits the families in your community. You work tirelessly with outside agencies to ensure that appropriate support for families is in place.

Staff and governors are well trained in all aspects of safeguarding children and they

are up to date with recent guidance. Governors ensure that the checks made on newly recruited staff are rigorous.

Inspection findings

- A focus for this inspection was how effectively the school keeps a check on the progress children make. The school has a thorough system for assessing children's progress in all areas of learning. Teachers make evaluations of children's learning and their emerging needs on a daily basis. 'Special books' chart children's significant points of progress. They also celebrate children's successes, which staff share with parents, who also contribute to the books. This informs teachers' planning. Information about how well the different groups and cohorts of children are doing is tracked and monitored carefully by senior leaders. Children make good progress from their starting points in all areas of learning.
- Provision for children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is a great strength of the school. Staff and the highly effective special educational needs coordinator track carefully the progress of children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The special educational needs coordinator ensures that resources, support and interventions are all tailored to the individual needs of these children. External advice and support are sought in order to provide the best possible care for them. As a result of this, they make good progress. Staff quickly identify children at risk of not making progress and put in place actions to support them.
- During the inspection, I also considered how teachers help to develop children's language skills in all areas of the curriculum. Since the previous inspection, staff have received guidance and training on how to support learning through talk. As a result, they talk a great deal with and to the children with whom they are working and they ensure that children's language development is given absolute priority. They use questioning to help children understand what they are learning and they introduce new words to broaden children's vocabulary. Occasionally, in adult-led sessions, adult talk can dominate. While this benefits children in terms of hearing the English language being spoken, it sometimes limits children's opportunities to talk with each other about their learning or to try using the words or sentence structures that the adults demonstrate.
- Leaders and staff are committed to teaching children early phonics skills on a regular basis. Occasionally, the activities provided to support these skills do not meet the needs of the children who are at the very earliest stages of identifying sounds in words. Leaders are keen, quite rightly, to ensure that all staff receive further training to improve further their skills in this aspect of their work with children.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the learning environment provides a wider range of opportunities for children to

apply their early number and early literacy skills

- displays in classrooms consistently celebrate and chart children's progress in early literacy and number skills
- staff receive training and guidance to enhance their teaching of phonics
- staff give children further opportunities to practise the language they are taught and to talk with each other about their learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Ruth Dollner
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I had discussions with senior leaders and middle leaders about their school improvement work and safeguarding arrangements. I met with representatives of the governing body. I went on learning walks with you and the deputy headteacher in classrooms and in the outside learning environment. I talked with children and with parents. I scrutinised a range of documents relating to the school's self-evaluation and to safeguarding. I analysed minutes of governing body meetings. The 41 responses to the Parent View questionnaire were reviewed, as were the large number of staff responses to the staff questionnaire. I spoke with a representative of the local authority.