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Mrs Elizabeth Newton
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Newton

Short inspection of Highfield Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 21 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 the school was judged to be outstanding in July 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Indeed, provision is even better and governance, which was an area identified for improvement in the previous inspection, is now exceptionally effective. Since the previous inspection, you have expanded and successfully included the Butterflies provision, for the education of two-year-olds.

Through your inspirational leadership, you continue to provide a warm and stimulating environment within which children and staff thrive. Staff are proud to work at Highfield Nursery School. You work in close partnership with your deputy headteacher who provides exceptionally good support and leads well on her areas of responsibility.

A key to the school's success, in enabling children to achieve their very best, is the outstanding work you do with parents and families. You and your staff have built a strong and trusting relationship with parents so that they can support their children's development and well-being and, hence, contribute actively to the progress their children make.

You provide an exciting and rich curriculum, based on stories that promote a love of reading and underpin children's success in learning. Adults use the outdoor area highly effectively to provide almost unlimited opportunities for exploration, investigation and creative role play. Both indoors and out, children are fully absorbed in their learning activities.

The two-year-olds are very well settled and as involved as the older children in their learning. Children explore forests and meadows, hunting mini-beasts or pretending to be explorers. Children love attending school. A typical comment from a parent was that 'My child is very disappointed when I can't bring her here on a Saturday.'

You take the approach that each child is unique; you and your staff know each one exceptionally well. Staff closely tailor the activities to the learning development and needs of each child. You track each child's progress well so that the next steps in learning and development build precisely on previous learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

The strong culture of care for children's well-being supports the school's safeguarding work. Adults are very well attuned to the needs of individual children, both in the Nursery classes and in Butterflies. Staff quickly pick up any signs that children may not be happy or feel anxious. In a skilled and supportive way, staff tease out reasons for children's behaviour or mood and support them to participate in activities. Any concerns of a safeguarding nature are reported assiduously and followed through well, involving external agencies and professionals where necessary.

Working with other leaders, you have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose; records are detailed and of a high quality. Your diligent checks on attendance, together with careful follow-up of any non-attendance, add to the comprehensive nature of your safeguarding procedures.

The close relationships with parents means that you and your staff very quickly identify families who need extra support. You go out of your way to ensure that children receive the care, support and guidance they need.

Inspection findings

- As part of the inspection, I followed a number of lines of enquiry. The first area I focused on was the extent to which governance has improved since the previous inspection. The chair of governors provides a very well-informed lead to the work of the governing body, making sure that the wide range of skills and backgrounds of members are used highly effectively to support the school's work.
- Governors regularly visit to see for themselves how well the school is performing and to check on specific aspects of the school's work, such as the safeguarding arrangements. Governors are much more engaged than previously with parents and provide useful information to them about their work, and the impact governors have on the school.
- I looked at how well the school uses the additional funding for children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, to promote their achievement. The funds are used in highly effective ways to promote the learning and development of children, who are making rapid progress as a result. The children supported by

the funding participate fully in all the activities provided for them.

- In addition to working with specialists, you have trained the staff to skilfully support children who have speech, language and communication needs, and autism. Adults who work on a one-to-one basis with children are highly skilled and sensitive to the needs of children. Each child is helped to join in with activities and learn alongside others to gain the most benefit from the provision.
- Pupil premium funding is carefully targeted to meet the needs of disadvantaged children. The children benefit from opportunities to expand their experiences and support their learning, such as a visit to Colchester Zoo to stimulate their ideas for story writing and imaginative play.
- The school's assessment information shows that disadvantaged children and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making exceptional progress. In the case of disadvantaged children, there are no significant differences in their attainment when compared with other children. However, your analysis of the impact of the different uses of the pupil premium and special needs funding does not provide sufficient detail about which are the most effective.
- I considered how effectively leaders promote the learning of the most able children. Our observations confirmed that the most able children are achieving strongly. You set very high expectations, not only for the most able, but also for others who have the capacity to achieve at a high level. Your high aspirations have a particularly significant impact on the most able disadvantaged children, who do not always begin with high levels of attainment, but are encouraged to aim high and are given the confidence to do exceptionally well.
- High-quality activities give plenty of scope for the most able children to develop depth and breadth of learning. An example of effective activities was seen when a group of children created an impressive film about the journey of the 'Naughty Bus', a book that they are reading currently. The children used a wide range of props to follow the story, taking photographs and 'hiring' others to act out key parts. Each child involved had a role, such as the 'videographer' or the 'director'. The activity provided plenty of challenge for the most able within the group to thrive. The end product, a short film put together by the children themselves, was masterful.
- I focused on how well the school supports children's personal, social and emotional development. Overall, your nurturing but systematic approach to children's personal development is highly successful. The way you and your staff help children develop their sense of identity, self-confidence and self-esteem is a significant strength. Children, including the two-year-olds, develop a strong sense of belonging, so that, whatever their background, they fit in and learn to get on with one another exceedingly well. Lunchtime in particular is a great occasion where children engage with ease and great self-assurance in social conversation with one another and with adults.
- You have developed a very robust system to assess children's resilience. Your chosen approach has a significant and positive impact on improving children's emotional development. Staff use the system to help children strengthen their

ability to deal with tricky or challenging situations, including how to learn from failure in order to then succeed.

- The final area I investigated was the provision for children aged two, added to your school since the previous inspection. You have used the same carefully considered approach to tailoring the provision to the needs of the youngest children as you have for the older ones in the Nursery. Staff are aware of the different requirements of the younger children in Butterflies and provide sensitive support and challenge. The children flourish and make rapid progress in their early development.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- analysis of additional funding, such as the pupil premium and for special educational needs, is linked closely to the impact it has on children's learning and development.

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

Yours sincerely

Gulshanbir Kayembe
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you to discuss the progress the school has made since the previous inspection. I held meetings with the deputy headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, a group of governors, including the chair and vice chair of the governing body, and a representative from the local authority.

As part of the inspection, I scrutinised a variety of documents and records, including the school improvement plan, records of leaders' monitoring and self-evaluation, and the school's information about the progress children make.

I examined the school's safeguarding arrangements and child protection procedures and documents.

Together, we observed learning across the Nursery classes and Butterflies, viewed work in children's learning journals, and spoke to children about their activities.

I spoke to some parents as they collected their children from the school. I took account of 42 parental responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as 15 staff responses to the Ofsted survey for staff.