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31 May 2017

Ms Jo White  
Headteacher  
Portman Early Childhood Centre  
12–18 Salisbury Street  
London  
NW8 8DE

Dear Ms White

### **Short inspection of Portman Early Childhood Centre**

Following my visit to the school on 9 May 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 January 2014.

#### **This school continues to be outstanding.**

The leadership team, ably supported by a committed and knowledgeable governing body, has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection, and the one before that. You should be rightly proud that your school remains outstanding for the third inspection in a row. You have built a strong team of leaders at all levels. They help you ensure that the provision you offer remains of the highest quality.

You and your team are constantly seeking to refine your practice further. Recently, you focused on how to evaluate children's progress even more effectively. The resulting records, which are completed at key points in the year, are very detailed and clearly show the excellent progress that children are making in acquiring new skills. They also crucially identify areas where children need further support or challenge to fully maximise their learning across the curriculum.

Building trust among all those who work in and visit the centre is at the heart of all you do. As a result, relationships among staff are very strong and parents hold your work in extremely high regard. Feedback from parents showed how much they value what you do for them and their children, with comments such as, 'this is like a family,' and, 'my child feels it is their second home'.

The previous inspection report recommended that you increase children's use of technology to support their learning. You have tackled this well. One of the ways in which you did this was to install a large, interactive white board for the children to use, and records show that they enjoy doing so.

This further supports them in developing their technological skills. You agree that you still need to measure the impact of this on other areas of learning.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and detailed records are kept. You work in very close conjunction with other services to ensure that any concerns are dealt with in a timely and effective manner. Your big focus is to work preventatively with families to nip any issues in the bud. Families say overwhelmingly that they feel well supported and comfortable to come to you and your team with any problems. Parents trust you and know you will help. This in no way diminishes your vigilance, but these open channels of communication do reduce feelings of isolation and empower parents to put things right early.

Governors also support the strong safeguarding agenda in the school. You report to them regularly on a range of safeguarding matters. There is a clear understanding of current national issues such as radicalisation and gang culture, and you, your governors and your leadership team are careful to ensure that staff know what this means at a local level. You have ensured that the premises are set up in such a way that children are kept safe while still being able to host drop-ins and other services for parents and the local community.

### **Inspection findings**

- I was keen to explore how you have maintained such high standards. In speaking to your leaders and senior teachers, it became apparent that everyone has a deep, shared understanding of how young children learn.
- Staff are highly skilled at knowing exactly if, when and how to intervene to support children in their learning. They ask open-ended questions that encourage children to explore their own ideas. During the inspection, I witnessed a member of your teaching team approaching a child who had spent quite some time looking at a book in the reading area. Just at the point where he was getting restless, she went over and began to discuss the book with him. This led to him asking her to read him another book, which they also discussed. All in all, he spent over half an hour focused on reading-related activities, an impressive achievement for such a young child. This was typical of the way adults supported children throughout the day.
- There remains a strong focus on developing language. For example, there is the very clear expectation that children will answer in full sentences. Adults consistently prompt and encourage them to ensure that this happens. Children therefore make rapid progress for their age in acquiring strong skills in spoken English.
- The other area I looked at was whether children from different groups, including those from different starting points, were still making outstanding progress.

- Children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve exceptionally well. Staff discuss children's strengths, interests and any barriers they may have to their learning regularly, both among themselves and with parents. Consequently, they understand what will support and motivate children to learn new skills.
- The most able children, including the most able disadvantaged children, also make strong progress because their teachers plan a good level of challenge for them within different activities. For example, they have their own story-time group where they are posed philosophical, open-ended questions such as, 'how do you know if someone is lying?'. This enables them to explore their own ideas in depth. In this instance, their answers covered references to Pinocchio and how negative situations 'make your belly hurt'.
- Children of middle ability also make excellent progress because the environment is stimulating, and they are challenged to take risks and push themselves in their learning. For example, there is a tool table with real, adult tools that fascinate children. Staff are vigilant in teaching children how to handle these tools appropriately. This enables children to use chisels, saws and screwdrivers safely to develop excellent hand-to-eye coordination and manual dexterity.
- In short, no matter what their starting points or backgrounds, all children have an equal chance of making rapid and sustained progress. This is because you and your staff believe that all children can achieve well and work together highly effectively to continually develop your practice to ensure that this is the case.
- On the day of the inspection, the lunchtime routine was overly long and this meant that some learning time was wasted. Additionally, the story time at the end of the day did not work as well for some groups as for others due to the way it was organised. You agreed that, although this did not happen every day, it was sometimes the case and that, by reorganising your routines, you could create even more time for learning.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- lunchtime and end-of-day routines are further tightened so that learning is fully maximised.

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

Yours sincerely

Jeanie Jovanova  
**Ofsted Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, the inspector carried out the following activities:

- met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, special needs coordinator and a senior teacher, as well as speaking to a number of other staff informally
- held a meeting with the vice-chair of the governing body and the governor with responsibility for special needs, as well as with a representative of the local authority
- observed children in a range of learning activities across the school at different times during the day, as well as seeing how they conducted themselves at the start of the day, at lunchtime and at the end of the day
- reviewed a range of documents, including records showing the work of the governing body, the school's evaluation of its own work and leaders' plans for improvement, and information about children's progress and attainment. The school's single central record of pre-employment checks and other safeguarding documentation were also reviewed
- considered the 12 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, along with the comments made using the free-text facility. She also spoke to a wide range of parents on the day of the inspection. Five responses to the staff survey were also considered.