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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Lindsey Weedall
Headteacher
Birchfield Nursery School
Victoria Avenue
Widnes
Cheshire
WA8 7TH

Dear Mrs Weedall

Short inspection of Birchfield Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 18 July 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 November 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. From my first meeting with you and your deputy, I was impressed by the strong ambition that you have for children and staff at your school. You show a steely determination to drive the school onwards and upwards. You are ably supported by your talented and enthusiastic deputy headteacher, who is taking over the reins as headteacher when you retire at the end of this academic year. You embrace change and are continually striving to improve. For example, you have adapted provision to accommodate a significant increase in the number of children joining the nursery in September 2017. A new and more structured approach has been introduced to the teaching of phonics. This is beginning to have a positive impact on outcomes for pupils. For example, as we toured the nursery I observed children identifying initial sounds, rhyming words and writing their names. From their different starting points most groups of children make strong gains in their learning and achieve well in most areas of learning. However, you quite rightly recognise that outcomes in reading could be better.

The school is a happy and harmonious place for children to learn. There is a close-knit, family-orientated and nurturing atmosphere in the school. Children clearly enjoy the time that they spend in school and typically told me, 'coming to nursery is the favourite part of my day'. The children are delightful and a credit to the school and their families. Their joy at attending Birchfield Nursery School is evident from the moment they walk through the door. Their love of learning and happy, smiley faces do not falter throughout the day. They feel safe and trust adults to look after them.

The standard of behaviour that I observed during the inspection was impeccable and relationships at all levels were respectful.

Your school broadens children's experiences by providing them with an interesting range of outings and visitors to the nursery. For example, children make regular trips to a local park to view seasonal changes. They visit a local high school to take part in activities which enhance their creativity and develop their awareness of the natural world. Authors, musicians and sports coaches come into the nursery to work with the children. Such lovely experiences foster effectively children's love of learning and develop their life skills.

Collaborative working is a strength of the school. The school has established links with local schools to support and challenge each other. Childminders also value greatly the training and coaching provided by your staff to help them develop their skills and practice in early years provision.

The quality of the learning environment, most notably outdoors, is breathtaking and makes a significant contribution to the good progress that children make. Teachers in neighbouring local authorities and from afar afield as Shanghai have visited the school to observe the learning environment and practice at your school.

Staff are proud to work at the school and hold you and your deputy in high regard. Through your encouragement, support and approachability many feel empowered to develop their roles in education.

Parents and carers are equally resounding in their praise of the school. Almost all parents who made their views known comment most favourably on the good progress that their children make. This was particularly the case of parents of children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. I believe that the following comment sums up perfectly parents' overall sentiments about your school: 'a unique place, fabulous staff and incredible grounds – a child-centred oasis'.

You and I both agree that to drive the school forward, improvements need to be made to the school development plan, the feedback given to teachers after observations of teaching and learning and to the procedures that are currently in place to facilitate the sharing of best practice.

At time of the previous inspection, the inspector identified the need to develop the staff's use of questioning and to provide more opportunities for children to learn about number through everyday activities. You and your staff did not shy away from this challenge. Staff have accessed training and a mathematics lead has been appointed. As a result, children's outcomes in number have improved and some staff now use questioning more skilfully to challenge and deepen children's learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records contain all the required detail. The training that staff and governors receive

ensures that they are well equipped to notice and report concerns. All staff have read part 1 of 'Keeping children safe in education'. Staff have also completed 'Prevent' training and talk with some confidence about the indicators of extremism and radicalisation. All staff are fully aware that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

Those who have designated responsibility for safeguarding have received training at an appropriate level. There are secure procedures in place for the recruitment, selection and induction of staff. The school site is safe and secure. Visitors' identity is checked closely. Inspection evidence shows that arrangements for the safe collection of children at the end of the morning and afternoon sessions are monitored closely by senior leaders.

Representatives from the fire and police service come into school and talk to the children about keeping themselves safe. However, children really do know how to keep themselves safe. For example, during the inspection several children confidently told me that they had to wear sun cream and hats to stop the sun from burning them.

Inspection findings

- Learning at your school is active, exciting and fun. No learning time is wasted and staff spend a great deal of their time interacting with the children as they learn and play. Activities provided cover all seven areas of learning. Many staff make good use of their voices and facial gestures to engage and sustain children's interest. Children are keen to learn. They show good levels of cooperation when working as part of a group. Children are confident and independent. Conversation flows freely as children play. There is a real buzz of excitement around your school as children engage in purposeful learning, particularly outdoors. Although we both acknowledge that most children are making good progress, outcomes in reading are not as high as they could be. From my observations, better use could be made of the learning environment indoors to foster children's love of reading. You also acknowledge that the school could do more to encourage parents to take a more active part in developing their children's reading skills at home.
- Clear plans for improvement are set out in the school development plan. However, on occasions, they do not reflect current school priorities, such as improving outcomes in reading. Furthermore, at times, timescales and monitoring arrangements of the actions set are not as rigorous as they could be.
- You recognise the importance of keeping a watchful eye on the quality of teaching across the nursery. Reviews of the teaching and learning are done through lesson observations, work scrutiny and planning reviews. However, the feedback given to teachers after observations of teaching and learning do not provide enough detail about the progress that different groups of children are making.
- There is a strong commitment to ongoing professional development, and training needs are now more closely linked to school priorities. We are in full agreement that systems to allow teachers to learn from the best practice in the nursery and at other schools in the locality are at the early stages of development and not embedded into practice.

- Although low in number, you give careful thought and consideration as to how the early years pupil premium funding is spent to support disadvantaged pupils. You are well aware of the barriers that this group of children face that may impact on their learning. The progress that disadvantaged children make is monitored closely to ensure that they perform as well as their peers. The money is mainly spent on additional staffing, training and resources. Such effective practice ensure that these children flourish and are able to take a full and active part in all that the school has to offer. It also demonstrates the school's strong commitment to equality of opportunity.
- Transition arrangements into the nursery and onwards to primary school are effective and tailored to meet the needs of each individual child.
- Governors are ambitious for each child to achieve to the best of their ability. They are aware of the school's strengths and priorities for development. A recent review of governance has been commissioned to ensure that the level of challenge they offer to the new headteacher is even more rigorous.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- outcomes in reading improve and are sustained over time
- targets in the school development plan are consistently linked to current school priorities and that monitoring arrangements for the actions set are timely and rigorous
- teachers are provided with detailed feedback of the progress that different groups of children make after observations of teaching and learning
- structured procedures are embedded to allow teachers to observe best practice in the nursery and at other schools in the local area and beyond.

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

Yours sincerely

Sheila Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher and members of the governing body. I also had informal discussions with a group of parents and staff, as well as children, to seek their views of the nursery. I talked to a representative from the local authority on the phone. We went on a tour of the school to see the learning that was taking place. I looked at examples of children's work and observed their

behaviour during lessons and as they moved around the nursery. I reviewed a range of documentation, including the single central record, the nursery's self-evaluation and records relating to the monitoring of teaching and learning. I also took account of the responses to Parent View, the online Ofsted questionnaire completed by parents and staff. Consideration was also given and of the school's own questionnaire to parents.