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Ms Rachel Hogarth-Smith  
Headteacher  
Rachel McMillan Nursery School and Children's Centre  
McMillan Street  
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London  
SE8 3EH

Dear Ms Hogarth-Smith

### **Short inspection of Rachel McMillan Nursery School and Children's Centre**

Following my visit to the school on 19 September 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 October 2012.

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

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

#### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Keeping children safe lies at the heart of the work of this school. The headteacher in her previous role as deputy headteacher has led on safeguarding for many years in the school and continues to do so. She has incisive knowledge about the children and their families. Staff are confident in how to use the referral system, and use it consistently and effectively to safeguard children. A unique feature of the school is the care and support offered to parents and carers, as well as children. One parent described how school staff supported her to get through a difficult period in her life. Stories of this nature were common among the parents whom I spoke to during the inspection.

Members of the governing body also have strong expertise and understanding of how to keep children safe. The newly appointed premises manager ensures that the site is kept safe and secure.

Staff are highly vigilant and care deeply about the children they work with. During learning activities, they make sure that safety is always a priority. For example, during a highly engaging water play activity, adults reminded children to take care 'not to slip', to safely take turns and to wear suitable clothes to keep themselves

warm and dry. These reminders punctuated the highly skilled talk for learning between the adult and the children. Children made very swift progress in their understanding about direction, speed, force and length.

## **Inspection findings**

- My first focus during the inspection was to evaluate the capacity of the current leadership team to sustain the outstanding standard of education seen during the previous inspection. The headteacher took up her post in September 2017 having been the deputy headteacher at the school for over a decade. A new deputy headteacher joined the school in September. The senior leadership team was joined by a very well-established teacher in the school who is now the leader for teaching and learning.
- The chair of the governing body has remained in post since the time of the previous inspection and has been joined by governors with a strong range of skills and expertise. A further three parent governors have been recruited this year and there are effective plans in place to induct them into their new roles. Governors have increased their challenge role since the previous inspection and they recognise that this is key to ensuring the continued success of this very special school.
- The capacity to maintain the outstanding standard of education and to ensure that the school continues to improve is extremely strong. Leaders' self-evaluation and action planning are sharp. They have identified the right priorities to improve provision even further. The headteacher is passionate about improving the provision. She is forensic in her approach to school improvement and her incisive knowledge of the school, and the community over time, is invaluable. The new deputy headteacher has brought enthusiasm and expertise to her role and has very quickly identified areas to work on to improve the provision further. She has an accurate view of the current quality of teaching across the school and is working well with the headteacher to fine-tune actions to ensure even stronger achievement for children across the nursery. All leaders are role models for staff. They exemplify strong practice in talking to and working with the young learners in their care.
- Leaders have thought carefully of how best to meet the needs of the two-year-olds in their care. As a result, the provision meets their needs extremely well indeed. Two-year-olds play and learn alongside older children in the various classrooms, known as 'shelters'. They have key workers to support their needs and the learning environment also meets their needs very well. For example, there are cosy sofas available if they require a nap. Parents are welcomed into the school to help their children settle in. Parents spoken to during the inspection were delighted with their children's first experience of school.
- Leaders have also thought and planned carefully for their 30-hour free provision. The take-up so far has not been as strong as expected due to issues with parents receiving their funding. However, leaders are proactive and supportive. They help parents to make sure that they access the funding that they are entitled to.

- The school engages with a range of partnerships to share best practice across the local authority. It is host to borough-wide training. Leaders work collaboratively with schools from other phases of education to support transition and to share good practice. Leaders work collaboratively with the children's centre and are part of the 'early help' group.
- Leaders work well with the local authority and receive excellent advice from the early years improvement partner. They are reflective and take on board areas identified by the improvement partner to support their own evaluation and planning.
- My second focus for the inspection was to evaluate the progress that children make from their varying starting points when they join the nursery. Leaders carefully track the progress that children make in all areas of learning. From their various starting points, children attending the nursery in 2016/17 made strong progress and attained very well in relation to skills and knowledge seen typically. Children's profiles show strong sustained progress over time in all areas of learning.
- Staff are in the process of assessing children's skills and knowledge as they start at the nursery school this term. From their own data analysis, leaders have identified the areas of learning that they are prioritising to enhance children's achievement further. For example, they recognise that the learning environment could be further enhanced to incorporate more guidance to children on developing their early writing and number skills.
- The new leadership team has also identified that its assessment systems could be further developed to help leaders to chart the small steps of progress made by children who have specific learning needs or those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The current system does not always help them to recognise the strong impact they have had on the progress that these children make in terms of their specific abilities and needs.
- My final focus for the inspection was the quality of teaching and learning and how staff helped children to develop as independent learners (this was an area for development identified at the previous inspection).
- Teaching and learning at Rachel McMillan Nursery School is underpinned by warm caring relationships between staff and children. Even more inspiring are the relationships children have with each other. Within days of settling into the nursery, children are respectful to each other and they learn to take turns and be polite. As one parent put it, 'The kids all help each other and look after each other here.'
- During the inspection, children confidently said 'Excuse me' to me or politely asked me to help them or to let them show me what they were learning. This was true even of the very youngest learners in the school. Relationships allow children to take risks and 'have a go' in their learning. Children have no sense of getting things 'wrong'. They simply rethink and are guided sensitively to make sensible choices about their learning. Hence, they experience success and believe themselves to be good learners from a very early age.
- The provision motivates children to access activities which help them make

progress in all areas of learning. The outdoor learning environment is particularly impressive. As a result, children make swift, excellent progress in their physical development. During the inspection, staff were guiding children to become independent learners and children were confident to engage with a range of activities on offer. They were confident in mediating between others and in negotiating their turn to use particular resources. The early years foundation stage characteristics of effective learning are evident across the nursery school. Children learn through playing and exploring. They are active, creative learners. This was exemplified by two children who invited me for tea. They 'made' me herbal tea and then asked for a critique of how it tasted. They then agreed together that they thought they could also make soup with the herbs, which they soon delivered to me, reminding me to 'be careful, it's hot!'

- An impressive feature of the nursery school are the 'stay and play' sessions for parents which help them to understand how to help their children learn. Parents value these sessions. Some stated that they had 'transformed' their relationships with their children.
- Staff are skilled at identifying next steps in children's learning and in supporting them from their starting points. However, occasionally, some children are not given guidance on the early phonics skills which they need to develop their emerging writing. Leaders recognise that children would benefit from further prompts in the learning environment to support their early writing (phonics) and number skills.

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

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the learning environment is further enhanced to support children's developing early number and literacy skills
- practitioners receive any necessary training to give them confidence in teaching early phonics skills to support children in developing their writing.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Greenwich. 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 about their school improvement work and safeguarding arrangements. I met with the chair of the governing body. I went on learning walks with you and the deputy headteacher. 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 two responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were reviewed and the school's own recent survey information was considered. I spoke with a representative of the local authority.