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Mrs Emma Walford  
Headteacher  
Spencer Nursery School  
Spencer Road  
Mitcham Junction  
Surrey  
CR4 4JP

Dear Mrs Walford

### **Short inspection of Spencer Nursery School**

Following my visit to the school on 27 September 2017 with Jean Thwaites, Her Majesty's Inspector, 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 February 2013.

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

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

Since the previous inspection, the school has federated with Hackbridge Primary School and there have been significant changes to the senior leadership team. You became the headteacher in 2015. You and the deputy headteacher share your time between the nursery school and the primary school. A deputy headteacher from another local primary school works with senior leaders on a consultancy basis for one day a week. Governance has been strengthened by the federation. The two schools share one governing body. A highly skilled chair ensures that this enables governors to develop and share good practice across the two schools and to hone further their skills of governance.

Leaders have ensured that the climate for learning in the school is strong. Caring relationships between adults and children underpin the work of the school. Staff model and promote enthusiasm for learning. Children are taught to respect and value each other and the adults who work with them. Parents value the work of the school and work in partnership with staff to realise the school's value of 'nurturing success'. Children achieve well during their time at the school. They enjoy their learning and benefit from a wide range of activities and tasks which develop all areas of learning.

Leaders have taken effective action to address the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. They continue to identify the right priorities to move the school forward. They also recognise that while they are on their journey to becoming an outstanding school, there is much to do in order for them to secure this overall judgement. Further work is needed to develop children's skills in talking about their learning with each other and with staff. Leaders agree that the learning environment would benefit from further development to support children to apply their early writing and number skills.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Keeping children safe is central to the school's work. Systems and structures in place to safeguard children are highly effective. Leaders secure external audits to ensure that safeguarding procedures are secure and up to date. Checks made on new staff are thorough and comply with regulations.

Regular and appropriate training for staff and governors ensures that all staff are extremely vigilant. They are knowledgeable about the signs to look for when considering if a child is vulnerable or at risk of harm. They use the school's referral system appropriately and are confident that leaders will always take swift and effective action to keep children safe.

Staff care deeply about the children in their care. During all daily activities, they keep a careful check on children's safety and well-being. Staff have a kind and caring approach towards children and this helps these young learners gain confidence and make good progress in all areas of their development. Children take risks, for example when they are climbing. They challenge themselves because they know that if they need help to keep safe, they can reach out their hand and an adult will be there to help.

### **Inspection findings**

- My first focus for this inspection was to evaluate the capacity of the current leadership team to continue to improve the school. You and the deputy headteacher provide strong, stable and sensitive leadership. You have made a good impact on school improvement since the previous inspection, despite being at the school on a part-time basis. Together with the governors and the consultant deputy headteacher, you have identified appropriate priorities to move the school forward on its journey to outstanding. The federation with the primary school has helped you to build capacity because you are sharing practice, debating issues and solving problems successfully across the two schools. The connection with the primary school has also helped you to fine-tune your good transition arrangements.
- Your business manager leads on safeguarding in the school. She adds strong capacity to the leadership team in this role, and is a constant and reassuring presence in the school.
- The chair of the governing body is ensuring that she continually challenges and

supports the governing body as a whole to improve their skills of governance. As a national lead governor, she is very well equipped to do this. Records show that governors have increased their level of challenge and further developed their support to the school since the previous inspection.

- You have introduced 'peer observations' to help practitioners share good practice and further develop their skills. You intend, rightly, to model this process for staff, which will help them to pinpoint specifically the teaching strategies that help children to make strong, sustained progress.
- My next focus for the inspection was to evaluate how effectively teachers keep a check on children's progress from their various starting points when they join the nursery. Teachers make very detailed observations and notes as they track the progress that children make in all areas of learning. They produce comprehensive 'learning journey' folders in partnership with parents. These folders both celebrate children's achievement through photographs and chart their progress through the comments of practitioners and parents. Practitioners have an insightful knowledge of the achievement of children with whom they work and they plan thoroughly to meet their individual needs.
- At the end of the summer term in 2017, leaders identified correctly that they needed to review the system for collecting and evaluating the achievement of groups and cohorts of children across the school. The system was not helpful in supporting leaders to track the small steps of progress that children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make. Leaders were also unable to track the progress of groups of children who have attended the nursery for a similar amount of time, to identify any differences in progress rates between different groups and cohorts. A new system has been put in place this term which leaders believe will address these issues. It is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of this system.
- Leaders and governors think carefully about the spending of the early years pupil premium funding. It is targeted well to support individual children with bespoke interventions. As a result, these children make strong progress. Progress is tracked by practitioners effectively and checked by leaders.
- My final focus for the inspection was to evaluate how effective leaders had been in responding to a particular area for improvement identified at the previous inspection. We therefore considered how well the indoor and outdoor learning environment supports children's development in all areas of learning. Since the previous inspection, leaders and staff have made a concerted effort to improve the learning environment across the school. As a result, they plan for all the areas of learning and, in addition, there are designated areas, tasks and activities planned for indoors and outside to support children's learning. Children enjoy learning and playing in all the areas available to them, and they benefit from a range of interesting tasks and activities. Learning is fun at Spencer Nursery School.
- While practitioners have made a great deal of progress in improving the learning environment since the previous inspection, there is still much to be done. Opportunities for children to apply their early writing and number skills are limited. Signs written by adults to entice children to 'have a go' at writing or to

draw them into an activity are sometimes untidy and do not provide a good model for children to follow. Adults sometimes write signs in a cursive script but the writing programme they follow with the children advocates printed script. Signs are often at a level of reading difficulty way beyond the reading skills of the children. Opportunities for children to use their number and early writing skills in a range of tasks and activities are limited. Leaders recognise this and have plans in place to help practitioners to share ideas and good practice to develop this aspect of their work further.

- Practitioners plan thoroughly to capture children's interest and to engage them in learning. The school improvement plan identifies the need to develop further communication, language and literacy across the nursery. Practitioners talk with children to teach them new skills, to share new knowledge and to help them to engage with tasks and activities. However, sometimes practitioners do not extend children's talk about learning by asking 'follow-up' questions. They often accept one-word answers or nods of the head without challenging children to explain their answers. Practitioners do not always build on the prior experiences that children bring to the task at hand. During adult-led activities, practitioners gave few opportunities for children to talk together about their learning during the inspection. Because communication is a priority for the school, leaders agree that they need to support staff in developing a range of strategies to help them to develop children's talk for learning even further.

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

Leaders and governors should ensure that practitioners:

- provide learning opportunities which are underpinned by high-quality talk and help
- consistently build on children's prior experiences and skills when they are supporting them with activities
- enhance the learning environment by offering more opportunities for children to develop and apply their early number and writing skills.

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

Yours sincerely

Ruth Dollner  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

Inspectors had discussions with senior leaders about their school improvement work and safeguarding arrangements. I spoke with the chair of the governing body and met a community governor. Inspectors went on learning walks with you and with the deputy headteacher. We talked with children and with parents. We scrutinised a range of documents relating to the school's self-evaluation and to safeguarding. We analysed minutes of governing body meetings. The 25 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were reviewed, as were the nine responses to the staff survey.