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Mrs Angela Prodger and Mrs Tracy Gallagher  
Joint Headteachers  
Pen Green Centre for Children and their Families  
Pen Green Lane  
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Dear Mrs Prodger and Mrs Gallagher

### **Short inspection of Pen Green Centre for Children and their Families**

Following my visit to the school on 10 October 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 November 2012.

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

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school is an exceptionally strong learning community. At its heart is a process of continuous learning by both children and adults. Pen Green leads a teaching school alliance. A large number of staff, including you, are senior figures in education who publish books and training materials for early years practitioners nationwide.

You have the very highest of expectations for every child. You believe that no limits should be set on their potential, regardless of their circumstances, ability or needs. Staff develop the communication and confidence of children with additional needs exceptionally well. They use toy figures, for instance, to retell the story of 'The Three Billy Goats Gruff'.

Staff are energetic and passionate in their work. They are guided by the strongest conviction that 'every day counts for every child'. Staff take time to get to know the children and their families thoroughly. They use this knowledge, and children's interests, to plan individual learning for each child. They make sure that children quickly gain new skills and busily develop their understanding. Staff ensure that learning is always challenging. Children pick up small stones using tweezers, for example, to build their grip. They can then use that skill to hold a writing pencil competently. Children are determined to succeed, even when the tasks are tricky.

The learning environment is vibrant and children enjoy learning. They use the many

spacious and highly attractive areas to construct with materials, use their imagination to paint, learn how to make marks, and begin to understand counting. There are also ample spaces for children to read. I saw repeated examples of children who were intensely excited by their learning. Some, for example, discovered how to measure themselves with a retractable tape measure. Others learned new words such as 'distance' and 'length'. Not surprisingly, children love to come to Pen Green each day to find out more. The school's records of children's achievements are meticulous. Teachers ensure that their assessments are accurate by rigorously checking them with many staff in other settings.

The excellent teaching at Pen Green means that children make consistently rapid progress from their starting points. These are typically much lower than those found in children nationally. Children's exceptionally positive attitudes to learning mean that they leave the school ready to move their learning on. Their behaviour is excellent. Children are very eager to learn. They listen well and sustain their attention for a long time, despite their young age. Children follow instructions well but are not merely compliant. Staff make sure that they develop the confidence to communicate their thoughts and to give their opinions. Staff work well with staff in other settings to ensure that arrangements for children's transition to primary school are as good as possible. They are currently engaged in research with local schools to check the effectiveness of this transition.

At the last inspection, inspectors asked you build on the opportunities staff have to share best practice. You attended to this thoroughly. Staff use both first-hand and filmed observations of each other at work to improve their practice. You give them every encouragement to attain advanced qualifications. Many have done so, or are doing this.

Like you, the governing body is justly proud of Pen Green. Governors completely refuse to be in any way complacent. They ensure that staff are continually improving their skills. They make sure that leaders are offering even more opportunities for parents to gain qualifications and learn how to support their children at home. The governing body ensures that pupil premium funding is very well used. Governors rigorously hold leaders to account for the progress that children make. You provide the governing body with detailed information on many different groups of children. You do not, however, include specific, precise information about the achievement of the most able children.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Staff at all levels, including volunteers, are thoroughly trained in safeguarding; this training is regularly updated and includes recognising and preventing extremism. New staff take part in an induction programme to ensure that everyone has the same information. Staff are highly alert to even the most subtle warning signs that a child could be being harmed. An extremely thorough system of sharing of information exists at Pen Green. This is nowhere more apparent than in respect of protecting children. Staff know their responsibilities to report any concerns, no matter how slight. They understand the school's procedure for doing this.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are detailed and of high quality. Any referrals to external agencies are done so without delay. Leaders are not afraid to escalate their concerns if they judge that the response from those agencies is not sufficient to ensure that a child is adequately protected.

### **Inspection findings**

- Staff learn continuously from each other by observing teaching within the school. They discuss what they have seen at length. Particularly strong features of practice are then used by others to improve their practice. They deal with any instance where teaching is not as effective as it could be.
- Staff take the greatest of care to build warm and highly positive relationships with the children. They speak respectfully to children at all times, give them both time to respond, and space to relax. As a result, children settle in very quickly. They feel extremely secure and this gives them the confidence to try new things and to be very resilient when they find things difficult.
- Staff at all levels are exceptionally familiar with the needs of two-year-old children. They place resources and furniture so that even the youngest children can make use of them. For example, I saw two-year-olds confidently climbing the stairs so they could explore the dinosaur jungle pod, and look down on friends below. Two-year-old children are fully integrated in the school.
- Staff are excellent role models for children. They take every opportunity to promote language and communication. Staff continually ask children, for example, to explain what they are doing or thinking, offer them choices or set challenges. This helps children to communicate clearly. They build their language very effectively as they repeat phrases such as 'it's more than one'.
- The outdoor environment is exemplary. It offers a wealth of opportunities for children to explore, cooperate and show what they can do. Children are extremely well motivated. For example, they explore the wooded areas, climb across the equipment and along the bridge, and slide down inside the tubes. Other children grow potatoes and other vegetables to make soups and salads.
- More than seven in ten children enter the school with skills below those typically found in children the same age. More than four in ten have skills that are well below this level. One in three children begin at Pen Green with very little or no English. Children make very swift progress from their starting points. A considerable proportion of children leave Pen Green with skills that exceed those typical for their age. Outstanding teaching means that children have excellent attitudes to learning. These contribute to their readiness to flourish in their primary school.
- The governing body is highly effective in its strategic role. Governors, however, cannot easily see how the most able children achieve, when compared with, for example, children whose abilities are more typical for their age.
- Parents I met were unanimously positive about teaching and all other aspects of the school. They explained how the school offers extensive opportunities to help

them support their child at home, particularly when a child has additional needs. They also spoke about the daily dialogue they have with staff. This ensures that they know how well their child is making progress, and that any issues can be rapidly dealt with.

- Leaders and staff ensure that children are taught extremely effectively about the wide variety of risks they might encounter, and how to protect themselves. This includes clear teaching about what children should do if they are asked to do something that makes them feel worried or uncomfortable. Children are also taught that they should politely let others know if someone is behaving in a way that is upsetting them.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the governing body receives timely information about the progress of the full range of groups of children, including the most able.

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

Yours sincerely

Roary Pownall  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met you and shared my lines of enquiry. I also met with members of the governing body. At the time of the inspection, there were too few responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, to consider, but I examined responses to its free-text facility. I also considered the views of parents who had replied to the school's most recent questionnaire and met with a number of them during the school day.

Together, we visited all classes in the school, where I observed children's behaviour and their attitudes to learning. I looked at samples of children's achievements in assessment folders. I examined the school's data on the progress of a large number of children of different groups. I viewed a range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school's current performance and its plans for further improvement, information on how the early years premium funding is spent and a number of policy documents and records, including those for safeguarding. I viewed the school's website to check that it meets requirements on the publication of specified information.