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Mrs Sue Bennett
St Thomas Centre Nursery School
Bell Barn Road
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Dear Mrs Bennett

Short inspection of St Thomas Centre Nursery School

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 December 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Indeed, the quality of provision within the school has been further strengthened. You and your staff provide a remarkably high standard of education for every child in the school. Children thrive in bright, stimulating and highly motivating learning environments, both inside and outside. You have created an exceptionally strong ethos of teamwork across the whole school, where every member of staff is committed to ensuring the best possible outcomes for all children.

You and your staff make sure that every child is seen as unique and special. 'Celebrating me' boards recognise children's achievements, however small. Parents and carers are encouraged to contribute to these boards through 'reflection bubbles' which enable all aspects of children's achievements at home and school to be celebrated. Across the whole school there is an atmosphere of calm. Children engage happily in purposeful play and delightful relationships exist between all staff and children.

Parents speak very highly of the school. They recognise the excellent care and support given to their children by all staff. As one parent said: 'St Thomas Centre Nursery provides a warm, caring and supportive environment for young children, with highly skilled staff who offer a wonderful environment for learning.' Staff work closely with parents to further support children's learning at home. Parents have opportunities to contribute to children's learning journeys through the development

of a new assessment system.

Following the last inspection, you were asked to improve the quality and range of mathematical activities. This was rapidly and successfully achieved. You immediately carried out an audit of the mathematical opportunities in the school. Staff support needs were identified and high-quality training addressed those needs quickly. You raised staff awareness of where mathematical opportunities could take place. As a result, outcomes in children's mathematical development rose rapidly and are in line with all the other areas of learning in the early years curriculum. Currently there are excellent opportunities for children to develop their mathematical skills.

Governors have an excellent understanding of all aspects of the school's performance. They challenge and support you and your leaders to make sure all children receive the best possible education. Information about how well children achieve is checked carefully by governors, and they ensure that any areas for development are followed up and improved quickly. Consequently, governors have supported the continued improvements to the quality of education in the school. As one governor stated, 'We never stand still.' There is no complacency, just a continual drive for excellence in every aspect of the school's performance.

Governors recognise the high quality of education in the school, and are committed to making sure that it continues. They are very proactive and have reacted quickly to the changes in national funding formulae for schools. Governors are reviewing all possible ways to secure the future financial viability of the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are detailed and of a high quality. All staff are highly vigilant and report any concerns they may have about a child quickly. Staff receive regular safeguarding training and information. Leaders check carefully that this training is understood by using a 'safeguarding quiz'. The results of this are analysed and leaders provide further support and training where needed. All early years welfare requirements are met.

Children are given a range of opportunities to learn about how to keep themselves safe. For example, they are taught about why they should wash their hands after going to the toilet or playing in soil, are helped to climb stairs independently and learn about using technology safely. Leaders also work with families to help them to understand how to keep their children safe when using computers and the internet.

Inspection findings

- The leadership of this school is exceptional. You and other senior leaders know every aspect of the school's performance in great detail. You skilfully identify where provision can be improved further and take effective action to do this. There is a continual journey of development as leaders strive for excellence. Leaders provide high-quality support to staff, especially those new to the school.

All staff show a strong desire to improve their practice. This means that the quality of teaching and learning continues to go from strength to strength.

- New leaders receive support and training to enhance the quality of leadership and management further. You and other senior leaders recognise the strengths in staff and ensure that they are used to the greatest effect. As a result, this school is providing education of the very highest quality, where all children make at least good progress, and the vast majority make outstanding progress.
- The quality of teaching and learning across the whole school is outstanding. Staff help children to grow in confidence and independence through their learning. This is preparing children extremely well for the next stages of their education. Every member of staff is highly skilled and they make sure that not a single moment of learning is lost during the school day. They expertly and swiftly spot every opportunity to take children's learning forward.
- Staff give children time to explore their learning, which staff then follow carefully. They match activities to children's learning needs and interests which results in children being stimulated, motivated and fully engaged in their learning throughout the day. For example, children were provided with a simple tray of flour. Staff observed as the children mixed the flour with water and discovered it made a dough. This exploration then led to staff planning baking activities to enable children to find out how flour changes when it is mixed and heated.
- Staff develop children's personal, social and emotional development superbly. Lunchtimes are an integral part of developing children's learning in this area. Staff sit with children and model good manners. Children are encouraged to say 'please' and 'thank you'. They take turns and understand how to wait patiently for their food to be served. Staff show children how to use their cutlery properly. Children are encouraged to socialise during this time in a calm and positive way.
- Children attend a residential trip to a farm and stay for a week. They have the opportunity to experience den building, making fires, riding donkeys, collecting eggs and discovering how farms work. Staff help to develop children's confidence when away from home without their parents. Opportunities such as this are giving them life experiences which are, without question, extraordinarily special.
- The school's improvement adviser has worked with the school's leaders and staff over many years. Highly effective support challenges leaders with 'reflective dialogue'. This supports leaders in reviewing the effectiveness of the provision and enables them to develop it further. The school is a 'community of learners', where all strive to improve. The adviser describes the school as 'world class'. This is a very apt description of a truly exceptional school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- plans to secure the future financial viability of the school within the current national funding systems continue to be explored and developed.

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

Yours sincerely

Ann Pritchard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection I met with you and a senior leader, two members of the governing body and your school improvement partner. You joined me on brief visits to lessons. I talked to children and observed their learning. I observed children's behaviour at lunchtime. I spoke to parents before school. I reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's own evaluation of its performance, the school development plan, documents relating to keeping children safe and the most recent information about their achievement. I considered the responses from the Ofsted online questionnaire from parents and their comments made through the text message service. There were no responses from the children's questionnaires. I considered 18 responses to the staff questionnaire.