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Mrs Sue Skinner
Executive headteacher
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Dear Mrs Skinner

Short inspection of Bowerdean Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 29 November 2017 with Timothy Rome, Ofsted 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 school was judged to be outstanding in March 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment in September 2015, you have directed the school superbly, leading with an exceptionally strong moral purpose. You are determined that all children, including the most vulnerable, get off to the best possible start. Parents are unanimous in their praise. They particularly value the warmth and expertise of staff, the high level of communication and the first-rate experiences their children benefit from. One parent, capturing the views held by many, commented, 'Really great nursery with amazing, friendly staff. My daughter absolutely loves going to nursery. If she had her way she would go every day of the week!'

At the time of the previous inspection, leaders were asked to seek ways to promote the school's outstanding practice more widely. You have risen remarkably to this challenge by ensuring that opportunities to apportion the school's outstanding work are now more widespread. Following an invitation from Buckinghamshire County Council in April 2015, you opened a new satellite centre known as Mapledean Nursery School. At this time, you and your governors also took on responsibility for Mapledean Children's Centre, which shares the same site. In September 2016, as well as overseeing the aforementioned three settings, you became executive headteacher of another local authority maintained nursery, Henry Allen Nursery School. In September 2017, in order to bring the schools even closer together, the governing body of Bowerdean Nursery (that also held responsibility for Mapledean Nursery School) and that of Henry Allen Nursery formally joined together to form a

hard federation called the Growing Together Federation. You and your staff have made the best possible use of partnership working across all three schools. Staff are trusted to be reliable decision makers. You have established a strong culture of learning from one another. This ensures that teachers and adults are engaged well in a cycle of ongoing improvement, enhancing further their understanding of how very young children learn best. The school is rightly beginning to influence practice even more widely, particularly with the impressive work it undertakes for children in receipt of the early years pupil premium funding. Consequently, more and more children, including the most vulnerable, are benefiting from the terrific level of expertise that you, your governors and staff possess.

You and your governors have a very clear view of the strengths and weaknesses of each setting, understanding the unique context that each one serves. As a result, school improvement planning is highly attuned to meeting the specific needs of the children and families of each school. You are highly adept at getting the best from staff, working to everybody's strengths in a highly intelligent manner.

Standards remain high. The majority of children start school with skills and understanding below those typical for their age. Many children speak English as an additional language and many start school with lower communication, language and literacy skills than those that are typical for their age. The majority of children, including those at an early stage of speaking English, end their Nursery Year with skills typical of their age in all areas of learning. This represents rapid progress. In recent times, both Bowerdean and Mapledean Nursery Schools have opened their doors to cater for two-year-old children. Children are well looked after and get off to a good start, making good progress from their starting points. Nevertheless, you acknowledge that more is needed to ensure that two-year olds make the same rapid progress as their peers.

Safeguarding is effective.

Staff display high levels of care for the children. Training for staff is thorough and conducted in a timely way. Staff clearly understand their roles, and when they have concerns they follow the school's reporting arrangements precisely. Appropriate training, clear lines of communication and well-maintained records underpin the school's systems for safeguarding pupils. You rightly insist on an extremely high level of consistency from site to site. Staff know families and pupils exceptionally well and work closely with them to find appropriate support when needed.

Children forge trusting relationships with adults and their key workers. Staff ensure that children who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are equally well supported and helped very effectively. Routines are well established, including at the start of the day. Children and parents are greeted by staff who keep watchful oversight as families enter the building. Transition into each session is seamless as children readily engage in activities and settle quickly because they know what is expected. Considering the very young age of many of the children, the extraordinarily orderly and calm start to each session is tremendous.

There are clear-cut and robust procedures for ensuring that children are kept safe. For example, on regular trips to the local woods to undertake forest school activities, risk assessments are thorough and staff prioritise children's safety, such as when conducting head counts systematically. Similarly, in learning time, children are encouraged to take controlled risk such as using a real hammer or screwdriver during construction activities. Staff are attentive and children are able to use a variety of tools safely and with confidence.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we looked closely at specific aspects of the school's provision, including the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements, the quality of teaching and learning and the impact of leaders and managers in driving improvement.
- A strong partnership is established with parents from the word 'go'. You and your staff are highly committed to home visits in order to aid a smooth transition into school. These set the tone by establishing your high expectations and exceptionally high level of commitment to working closely together. You also ensure that families have access to a wide range of additional services, such as speech and language therapy or additional childcare before and/or after school.
- Children start with below typical levels of skills and understanding, particularly communication and language skills. Rigorous entry-level assessments provide a secure platform, enabling adults to plan very effectively for children's next steps of development. Adults seize on opportunities to develop children's language skills, modelling language extremely effectively. For example, during an outdoor activity, children enthusiastically explored language by describing a slug they had unearthed. Children, including those who speak English as an additional language, develop strong communication skills because the teaching of speaking and listening skills is first class.
- Extra support available for children entitled to the early years pupil premium funding is of the highest calibre. The school works extremely closely with families to ensure that additional funding is used very effectively to remove potential barriers to learning. Leaders go the extra mile to understand a child's learning potential, including from a family's perspective. Innovative approaches, such as support to make adaptations within the home or paying for play sessions, have a marked impact on children's engagement. Leaders are unequivocal in their view that the benefits far outweigh the initial investment. Leaders are highly successful at ensuring that disadvantaged children make the same rapid gains as their peers in all areas of learning and achieve extremely well.
- Families who require additional support, including those who have had less than positive experiences at other settings, are extremely well supported. Initiatives in some cases, like a weekly review of a child's progress, mean that families quickly become fully engaged and suitably informed. Many parents talked glowingly about the level of support they receive and the impact that the Nursery has on their child's start to education.
- Adults plan a range of appealing and interactive activities that capture children's

imagination and curiosity very successfully. Children are able to make self-directed choices confidently. They show a keen interest in the tasks they select, and adults warmly encourage purposeful discussion about what they are learning. As a result, children display terrific levels of enjoyment, getting the most out of each day.

- Warm and positive relationships pervade. Adults guide pupils expertly, encouraging the rapid development of children's social skills. Time is used well to steer children in the right direction and promote the right choices. As a result, many develop a good awareness of others and their feelings. Children begin to understand and apply important values like kindness. As a result, children thrive on positive interactions with one another and their key workers. A cheery, easy-going atmosphere permeates each setting, and minor squabbles or moments of upset are uncommon.
- Consistent routines ensure that not a minute of the day is wasted. For example, children come into school happily, keen to participate in circle-time activities such as singing together. Classrooms and outside spaces are awash with activities that promote collaboration and children's curiosity and spark their creativity. Children are busy and enthused by all that is on offer.
- Adults are highly skilled and meet the needs of the children in their care very effectively. Consequently, children make rapid gains in developing their skills and understanding across all areas of learning. For example, when learning about other countries, one child was able to make increasing sense of the wider world, stating confidently, 'I live in High Wycombe, don't I?' Children are well prepared for their Reception Year, having skills and understanding typical or exceeding those expected of their age. Buckinghamshire Learning Trust is rightly proud of the school, noting that, because of the fantastic start, many children after starting their next school, go on to achieve a good level of development at the end of their Reception Year.
- You are determined that the both schools sit within the heart of their respective communities. Projects of mutual benefit are encouraged and revered, such as the helpful work that the Friends of Bowerdean are completing, in designing and renovating the outdoor area. You have carefully orchestrated the support of a local garden centre that is also benefiting from the recent performances of the school choir. Such collaborative partnerships rightly further bolster the high regard that this school is held in.
- As the partnership has grown, governors have played their part by ensuring that the school continues to be well placed to excel. They have collectively established clear systems for keeping a strategic oversight of work across the newly formed Growing Together Federation. They, too, hold the children's interests firmly at the heart of their work.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school's provision for two-year olds develops further so that more make the

same outstanding progress as their older peers.

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

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Farr
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, the deputy headteacher and two governors, including the chair of the governing body and two representative of Buckinghamshire Learning Trust. Inspectors observed learning in all classes at both Bowerdean Nursery and Mapledean Nursery. An inspector also visited Mapledean Children's Centre. Senior leaders accompanied inspectors on all classroom visits.

Inspectors scrutinised children's learning journeys. We also analysed a range of school documentation, including information about children's achievement, the school improvement plan and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. We discussed your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness. Inspectors took account of 17 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 11 written comments, and spoke to seven parents at the beginning of the day. Inspectors considered 21 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.