

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Mrs Susan Lacey  
Executive Headteacher  
Phoenix Nursery School  
Phoenix Street  
Blakenhall  
Wolverhampton  
West Midlands  
WV2 3JS

Dear Mrs Lacey

### **Short inspection of Phoenix Nursery School**

Following my visit to the school on 5 December 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 good in March 2014.

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

Since the previous inspection, the school has federated with Ashmore Park Nursery School. You have provided leadership support to Phoenix Nursery since September 2014 but were formally appointed as the executive headteacher of both schools in January 2016. Your deputy headteacher effectively supports you in leading and managing both settings. The two schools share the same governing body. Together, you have managed this federation seamlessly and without disruption to children or staff. You have utilised the successful practice at your partner school to develop further the quality of teaching and raise outcomes for children at Phoenix Nursery. You have begun to offer full-time provision, 30 hours a week, for a small number of eligible children, in order to increase their learning opportunities and strengthen their early development.

The steps you have taken have made a positive difference to the school and the pace of improvement has accelerated. You have continued to build on the school's strengths. You have developed and transformed the learning environment by adding an additional room and refurbishing, to a high level, the main classroom. Teaching areas are bright, vibrant and well resourced. You have improved the quality of teaching by providing high-quality training for all staff. This has resulted in increased staff confidence and greater understanding of children's individual needs. Teamwork is a strength and staff morale is high. In their questionnaire responses, all staff said that they are proud to work at Phoenix and that leaders use professional development to encourage, challenge and support their development.

Children are happy, safe and well cared for. Excellent relationships exist between children and their key workers. Children settle quickly to tasks and understand and follow routines and instructions. They behave well, take turns and are respectful to all adults and other children. The very good ratios of adults to children provided ensure that all children receive high levels of nurture and support. This enables them to thrive and get off to a good start in their education.

You have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection. Activities are well planned and purposeful. Careful planning by staff ensures that the broad range of activities offered meet the individual needs of children with different abilities. Children are encouraged to talk about what they are doing and happily join in with stories and rhymes. This helps develop their early communication and language skills. However, further work is needed to promote children's early reading skills. Additionally, leaders should ensure that evidence for children's starting points for all areas of the early years curriculum is collected when children join nursery. This is to support the accurate tracking of children's progress over time.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

There is a strong safeguarding culture within the nursery. This is because of the high priority you place on keeping children safe. Safeguarding procedures are robust and fit for purpose. All the proper checks on staff and visitors are carried out with thorough attention to detail, and record-keeping is meticulous and very well organised. You have ensured that all staff and governors are fully trained and conversant with the latest safeguarding guidance. Staff know what steps to take if they have a concern about a child. As the designated safeguarding leader, you carefully assess any concerns that are raised and swiftly follow these up with parents or the local authority as needed. Actions taken are fully logged and records are stored securely.

All adults contribute to keeping children safe. Strict rules are applied in relation to the use of cameras and mobile phones. iPads used by children have safety devices to ensure that these are used appropriately. Activities, such as visits to the park, are thoroughly assessed for potential risks and children are taught about stranger danger. Walking sensibly inside the classroom is also strongly promoted to avoid accidents. Regular fire drills are carried out so that staff and children know how to evacuate the building quickly. Parents are rightly confident that their children are kept safe at nursery.

### **Inspection findings**

- You, your leadership team and governors share a clear and ambitious vision. High expectations are set for children, staff and parents. You and your governors recognise the importance of high-quality professional development and strongly promote this. For example, you have formed an international network between four schools in the West Midlands and five pre-schools in Sweden. Additional funding has enabled your school and its partners to be part of a research project

using digital technology with young children. This advanced thinking has had a strong impact on children's early technology skills and adults' ability to teach this aspect of the development of children's skills.

- Governors are very supportive and present good levels of challenge to you and your staff. They carry out learning walks and receive regular reports from staff members to keep them fully informed of daily practice. Governors have invested heavily in improving facilities and teaching. They have employed an educational consultant to deliver good-quality training to ensure that practitioners develop their knowledge and skills to the highest level. They monitor children's achievement carefully and ensure that all groups achieve equally, for example boys and girls. They have a good knowledge of how the early years pupil premium is spent and the impact that this has on the small number of eligible children. They receive regular assessment updates and as a result, know how well different groups of children are doing.
- All adults carry out regular observations of children and you and your deputy headteacher keep a careful check on children's progress. Photographic evidence and annotated notes are recorded in teacher project books and children's 'learning together' journals. These journals capture activities at home as well as school, as parents are actively encouraged to add their comments. This adds to staff knowledge about individual children. However, teachers' assessments of children's abilities when they join the nursery are occasionally too low. Additionally, procedures are not in place to collect systematically evidence of the different areas of learning for each child at the point of entry. This detracts from leaders' ability to track children's progress over time in all areas of the curriculum accurately and take action to accelerate progress for individual children.
- Adults maximise every learning opportunity to promote children's communication and language skills. They model spoken and written language clearly so that children learn to use correct pronunciation of letters and sounds and full sentences. They use skilful questioning to check children's understanding and probe their thinking. Indoor and outdoor spaces are used well to encourage collaboration with other children and social interaction. Snack time is also used effectively to encourage children to talk about what they are learning. Children who do not speak English are supported well and staff make good use of sign language and gestures to communicate with children who are at an early stage of learning to speak English. Successful strategies ensure that newly arrived children quickly acquire age-related language skills. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are also well supported; speech and language therapy is accessed for children who have a delay with their communication and language skills.
- There are many strengths in the taught curriculum and children make the greatest gains in their personal, social and emotional development and their physical development. Rapid progress is also made in technology and in using materials and media. This is because children have daily opportunities to develop these skills and are guided well by adults. Opportunities to count are built into different activities and children are regularly encouraged to write their name or use their mark-making skills to depict their thinking. Adults share stories to encourage a love of reading and phonics skills are taught well. However, children

do not independently select books during their choosing time and do not have reading material to take home. The school's own information last year shows that children make less progress in reading than in writing.

- Teaching provides children with an exciting and relevant range of activities and experiences. Activities often build on the children's interests and follow a theme. For example, in learning about spiders, children showed high levels of engagement and sustained periods of concentration in making spiders out of clay. This was then developed by looking at or painting pictures of spiders. Effective adult support in the outdoors strongly promotes teamwork and the development of gross motor skills. A penalty shoot-out enabled children to practise and hone their football skills. Giggles and cheers demonstrated the clear levels of enjoyment experienced by all those who participated. Other activities, such as exploring the mud kitchen and making vehicles out of construction materials, promoted children's ability to be imaginative to good effect.
- Parents have very positive views of the school and greatly appreciate and value the work of you and your staff. Typical comments include, 'Phoenix Nursery School truly is a home away from home for the children' and 'The school has been amazing for my child. All staff are really supportive.' Communication methods, including use of social media, text messages, letters, emails and the school's website all serve to keep parents fully informed of school news and events. You have also worked hard at encouraging parents to be involved in their child's learning. Work packs are sent home to parents and video links are provided to demonstrate how parents can help their children. Termly 'learning together' sessions provide opportunities for staff to feed back to parents on their child's progress and for parents themselves to work alongside their children and witness the activities that their children participate in. Parents have a good understanding of how well their children are doing as a result. All parents report that their children are happy and safe.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- adults provide children with more opportunities to develop and extend their reading skills
- teachers assess children's starting points in all areas of the early years curriculum on entry to the school and use the information to track progress with greater accuracy.

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

Yours sincerely

Heather Simpson  
**Ofsted Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher and members of the governing body. I discussed the work of the school with you, including the processes and procedures in place for safeguarding. I also spoke to a representative from the local authority about the support provided to the school. I visited the teaching areas and observed and spoke with children in the morning and afternoon sessions. I also scrutinised copies of children's 'learning together' journals and records of teachers' observations.

I looked at a range of school documents, including the school's information about children's achievement. I also reviewed the school's own evaluation of its work, together with the school development plan. There were too few responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, to generate any results on the website. However, I took into account the views expressed by parents as they collected their children from nursery at the end of the morning session and the comments made by nine parents as part of Parent View. There were seven responses to the staff survey and their views were fully considered.