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Mrs Jan Allen
Headteacher
Thomas Wall Nursery School
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Dear Mrs Allen

Short inspection of Thomas Wall Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 14 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 outstanding in May 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

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

You took up your post as headteacher in 2013, having been the deputy headteacher at the school at the time of the previous inspection. You have maintained and built upon the strong climate for learning across the school. You have developed a culture of reflection and pride among staff which inspires them to do the very best that they can to give children a flying start to their school life.

There is a great sense of fun across the provision. Children and staff enjoy being at school. The learning environment never ceases to invite or engage children because it is of the very highest quality to ensure that children benefit from an outstanding education during their time at the school.

You have built on the excellent work of the previous headteacher to ensure that any areas for improvement identified at the time of the previous inspection have been tackled rigorously and extremely effectively. As a result, teaching, learning and assessment are outstanding.

You and the leadership team are planning strategically to involve parents more fully in their children's learning. You also recognise that a sharper emphasis on helping children to apply their emerging reading, writing and number skills would help improve overall attainment even further.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school has robust systems in place to safeguard children. You and the other designated leads know the children, their families and the community very well. You ensure that staff are well trained and vigilant about safeguarding. Referral systems are understood and used appropriately by all staff. All appropriate checks are made when new staff are recruited. You are proactive in securing local authority support to audit your safeguarding provision. You seek appropriate external advice to meet children's needs.

Your rigour in monitoring the provision ensures that you remind and prompt staff to ensure that children use equipment safely. You ensure that children work safely and happily together when they are not working alongside an adult. This continues to be an important focus for you, given the size and scope of the nursery school.

Inspection findings

- My first focus during the inspection was to evaluate the capacity of the current leadership team to sustain the outstanding quality of education seen during the previous inspection.
- You and your team are rigorous and relentless in your ongoing evaluation of the provision. You are a well-respected, strong leader and you provide an excellent professional role model for your team.
- Governors appointed a deputy headteacher to work with you who has added strong capacity to the existing leadership team. His incisive understanding of the information you gather about children's progress is helping to strengthen further your accurate evaluation of how successful the school is.
- Since the previous inspection, you and the governors have been successful in appointing other key members of staff, such as the teacher in charge of the outstanding assessment and resource base, 'Dragonflies'. Children who have specific learning needs thrive in this provision because of the high-quality teaching and pastoral support they receive, which help them to make excellent progress from their unique and varied starting points.
- You have the highest expectations when you recruit staff and do not appoint if your expectations are not met. This ensures that you have an excellent workforce. Staff are proud to work at the nursery and are committed to constantly reflecting on and improving their skills. You and the deputy headteacher are skilled in monitoring the quality of teaching and highlighting any areas for development. This means that staff receive the right guidance to enhance their skills and to continually improve the stunning learning environments across the provision.
- Governance continues to be a strength of the school. The chair of the governing body has remained in post since the time of the previous inspection and has ensured that governors offer support and challenge to you and your team, in equal measure. For example, governors have set high expectations with regard to attendance and challenged leaders to take action. As a result, attendance is

improving.

- My second focus for the inspection was to evaluate how practitioners help children to make good progress from their various starting points when they enter the nursery. I was particularly interested in how staff had strengthened the learning environment to help children be investigative, creative and imaginative in their learning. This was an area that was identified as needing further work at the time of the previous inspection.
- Leaders and practitioners responded positively to this area for development and as a result, the learning environment inspires children to engage in a wide range of stimulating tasks and activities which help them to make very strong progress in all the areas of learning. Governors supported leaders' plans to improve the learning environment and invested funding to develop an exciting mud-play area and secure a range of tools for children to develop their woodwork skills.
- Alongside resourcing, practitioners have benefited from ongoing training to improve their questioning skills. The impact of this was evident throughout the nursery. Practitioners routinely challenge children to think for themselves. For example, when something was not working, an adult said to a child, 'so what do you need to do to fix it?' This helped the child to think, investigate and problem solve. This sort of interaction was typical across the nursery. A strong feature of the school is the children's confidence to be creative and imaginative and to solve problems for themselves.
- The impact of careful planning to ensure that children achieve well in all the areas of learning and the impact of continuing staff training are clear. All groups of children make excellent, sustained progress during their time at the nursery. By the time they leave the nursery, a high proportion of children have attained knowledge and skills which are well above those typical for their age in most areas of learning. While progress is strong in all areas of learning, attainment in number, reading and writing is not as high as the other areas of learning.
- When you and the deputy headteacher observed teaching and learning with me, we noticed that, occasionally, practitioners do not challenge the children as much as they could in developing their early number, writing and reading skills. We agreed that some children were showing that they were capable of moving beyond mark-making to matching sounds to letters and making plausible attempts at writing words. Not all adults were confident in helping children to be successful with this. We also noticed some missed opportunities for children to apply their developing number skills to the wonderful real-life situations available to them across the school's learning environment. Sometimes, practitioners do not have the highest expectations for what children can achieve in these key aspects of learning. Occasionally, adults show children key skills but then fail to let children apply these skills themselves. For example, children were shown how to identify sounds in words for spelling. They were not then given the opportunity to practise doing this for themselves by articulating the sounds and blending them together.
- Parents speak very highly of the nursery school. Despite this, 'learning journeys' (books created to chart children's progress) show limited involvement from parents in their children's learning. You recognise that this is still an area for

development for the school. You rightly believe that new ways to involve parents in their children's learning may help improve attainment in reading, writing and number so that it is as strong as the other areas of learning. Nevertheless, the progress children make in all areas of learning during their time at the nursery is excellent.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- practitioners consistently challenge children to develop and apply their early number and literacy skills to further improve attainment in these areas
- they create opportunities to help more parents become involved in their children's learning.

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

I held discussions with senior leaders about their improvement work and safeguarding arrangements. I spoke with the chair of the governing body. I went on learning walks with you and the deputy headteacher. I talked with children and with parents. I scrutinised a range of documents relating to the school's self-evaluation and to safeguarding. I reviewed minutes of governing body meetings. I reviewed the 22 responses to the online survey, Parent View. I scrutinised children's learning journeys and reviewed the progress information that the school provided.