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7 February 2018

Miss Fiona Brinson
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Brinson

Short inspection of Hillfields Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 16 January 2018, 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 March 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

You, with the support of the senior teacher, have maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Parents and carers hold the school in high regard. One parent summed up the views of many by describing the school as 'excellent'. Another said, 'It is so great, I wouldn't want my child to go anywhere else.'

On your arrival in 2015, you spotted a few signs of decline and acted quickly to make improvements and restore the previously outstanding provision. In particular, you were concerned about the accuracy of how children's achievements were assessed, and you addressed this concern quickly. Your leadership ensures high-quality provision through which children continue to make very fast rates of progress. At the heart of your work are your high expectations and boundless determination to ensure that the school's performance is excellent. You and the senior teacher have inspired all members of staff to have an attitude of 'only the best will do for the children and their families.'

The children continue to make excellent progress. The outstanding curriculum plays an important role in ensuring this because it captures the children's imaginations. Throughout the day, children were fully absorbed by the wide range of interesting experiences. They were fascinated by the giant African snails and studied their shells with interest. The children were excited to count how often they could roll

energetically on a mat. They thoughtfully discussed and explored the capacity of containers when pouring water. The environment is well organised, with both the inside and outdoor areas ensuring that children have available a wide range of well-thought-out learning experiences. As children play, staff skilfully ask questions and encourage children to think, talk and explore ideas. This deepens children's understanding of what they are learning.

The high level of interest that the curriculum provides, along with the excellent teaching provided by staff, promotes outstanding behaviour. Children play and interact extremely well and are polite and caring towards one another. No unwanted behaviour was seen during my visit. Records and conversations with parents show that this is normally the case. Children follow the very clear nursery routines and the staff's gently given instructions about how they should behave. One parent summed this up perfectly by saying that the nursery was 'a happy place to meet new friends'.

Governors are now keeping a much closer eye on the school's performance. Governors are skilled at checking on the quality of the school's work and have a strong grasp of its many strengths. They use knowledge gained from regular visits and meetings with staff to check information about children's welfare and progress. Governors ask relevant and searching questions to help ensure that the highest standards are maintained. Governors share your determination for the school to be a great success. They conscientiously pay close attention to improving their skills to help them fully play their role in this success. The chair of governors has been at the forefront of the governors' work in ensuring that improvements were made quickly following your initial identification of some emerging weaknesses. Together you have ensured that there have been no distractions to prevent the children from receiving the highest standards of care and education.

You have maintained excellent relationships with parents. They value highly the range of workshops and help provided by the nursery. Parents talked about how well the staff listen to them and act quickly to support them when necessary. Parents commented on the high level of care that all staff provide and how quickly children settle into the nursery. During some sessions, parents are encouraged to remain with their children and play with them. This helps parents to find ways to support their children at home. Relationships are warm; all parents say that they are made to feel very welcome.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding remains a strength. Staff keep a very caring watch over each child. Staff know what to do if they see any signs that a child might be experiencing difficulties. Staff receive regular training about a wide range of safeguarding matters, most recently concerning female genital mutilation, child sexual exploitation and the government's 'Prevent' duty. There is a strong emphasis placed on promoting respectful and tolerant attitudes towards different religions and cultures. Staff provide children with opportunities to learn about how to keep safe including when using modern technology. Classrooms are well organised to ensure

that children can move about freely and safely. Leaders make regular checks to make sure that this remains the case.

Governors take their safeguarding responsibilities very seriously. The governor assigned to oversee safeguarding makes regular visits to examine the school's work in this area. Leaders responsible for safeguarding work closely with external agencies to ensure that children who are of concern receive the support they need.

All required checks are made when staff are recruited and new staff receive safeguarding training when they join the school.

Inspection findings

- Children make very fast progress in all areas of their learning from starting points that are much lower than typical for their age. They make particularly fast progress in developing their writing and mathematics skills. As a result, by the end of their time in nursery, most children reach the standards that are typical for their age. Children reach particularly high standards in their personal, social and emotional development and physical development. Children who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language also make rapid progress. The school is very successful at ensuring that all the different groups of children it caters for achieve equally well. As a result, children are well prepared for the next stage of education.
- Plans to use additional funding to help disadvantaged children achieve better are very successful. You have improved the quality of these plans and have selected the most effective methods of accelerating this group's progress. As a result, disadvantaged children are making very fast progress and reaching standards that are close to the other children in the nursery. In a few cases, plans do not identify or address the full range of barriers faced by disadvantaged children, such as their lower rates of attendance. Although children who do not attend regularly are achieving well, with better attendance, they could make even faster progress.
- You have identified the children's particularly low starting points in literacy and mathematics. You have successfully focused on improving their mathematical skills, which has led to them making rapid progress in this subject. Staff develop children's mathematical understanding by providing lots of interesting opportunities in classrooms and outdoors. Children enjoy counting, learning to use mathematical words and investigating the properties of shapes. Writing skills are also well promoted in all sessions and, as a result, children make fast progress in this area. Children are encouraged to develop their skills in forming letters and enjoy interesting opportunities to write independently. Staff teach phonics well and provide plenty of opportunities for children to listen to stories. Leaders have recently purchased new books for children to enjoy. Reading is taught well but children find the activities provided to promote their independent reading skills less engaging. As a result, although children learn to read quickly, they show less interest in this area and do not reach such high standards as in other areas of the curriculum.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- staff improve the quality of tasks children are given to develop their reading in order to promote a higher level of interest in this area
- they identify the full range of barriers disadvantaged children face, particularly in relation to attendance, and adjust plans to support these children accordingly so they make even faster progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Moore
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and the senior teacher, and spoke to a range of staff at the school. I talked to children while they were playing and learning. I met with five governors and spoke to a representative from the local authority. I conducted learning walks during the morning and afternoon sessions with you. I looked at learning journals and records of children's progress and attainment. I scrutinised the school's self-evaluation and development plan, the early years pupil premium plan, information about the school's performance, and safeguarding and child protection records. I considered the responses from Ofsted's free-text questionnaire on Parent View, and talked to a number of parents.