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Diane Frainer  
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Dear Mrs Frainer

### **Short inspection of York Road Nursery School**

Following my visit to the school on 6 February 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 November 2013.

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

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. The school went through a challenging time after the previous inspection, with many changes of leadership. The long-standing headteacher retired soon after the inspection. Governors were unable to recruit a replacement initially and interim arrangements had to be made. A new headteacher was appointed but remained in post for a matter of months. A second period of interim arrangements followed until you took up the post of headteacher in April 2015.

As a result of this upheaval, leaders were slow to address the findings from the previous inspection. The only area for development was to 'enhance the development of children's reading skills by ensuring greater consistency in the opportunities provided for them to link letters to their sounds'. After a slow start, you have ensured that, although there is still work to do, good progress is now being made in improving this key area of the school's curriculum. It is clear that the school's leadership is now both strong and stable once again.

You have done much to improve the school since your appointment and bring it back to its position as an outstanding school. For example, soon after you joined the school you took on the lead role for services for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities in the local area. This has raised the profile of the school within its educational community and has brought a wide range of training and other opportunities for staff. As a result, the provision for children who have SEN and/or disabilities is becoming a strength of the school.

Parents and carers are extremely positive about the school. Of those who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, virtually all would recommend the school to others. Many parents chose to leave additional free-text comments, almost all of which were positive. I spoke with a number of parents as they brought their children to school. Without exception, they spoke about how warm and friendly, kind and caring, they find the school to be. Parents talked about how much their children love coming to school. One parent summed up the views of many by saying of the Nursery's staff, 'They sprinkle a little bit of magic on the children!'

Governors are highly committed to the school. They know it well on a day-to-day basis and visit frequently. Governors believe, accurately, that the school remains outstanding. However, they accept that this belief is based more on 'gut feeling' than on firm evidence and careful evaluation. Governors know that it is important that they become more strategic in their approach to evaluating the school's effectiveness, such as by measuring the school against the descriptors in Ofsted's inspection handbook. Governors are keen to learn more about governance and to develop their roles further.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The school's single central record of pre-employment checks meets statutory requirements. It reflects a strong and thorough approach to ensuring that only suitable people are employed to work with children. You and the safeguarding governor check regularly that the record is up to date and fit for purpose.

Parents and governors commented on the school's caring atmosphere. Parents feel safe to leave their children with staff because they know that they will be cared for well. The children come to school confidently and happily because they feel secure in their learning environment. Staff work closely with families to provide support when it is needed.

### **Inspection findings**

- In order to check whether the school remains outstanding, I followed a number of lines of enquiry. Firstly, I chose to look at how leaders and governors have addressed the area for development from the previous inspection and how successful these measures have been. Frequent changes of leadership following the previous inspection meant that improvements were slow initially. You have since ensured that good progress has been made in this area.
- When I spoke with parents before school, without prompting, many commented on the Nursery's effective work on phonics. For example, one parent said, 'My child comes home wanting to find things that start with an 'a'', to explain the sort of activities children take part in and how enthused they are by the teaching they receive. This is because the school's daily 'five-minute phonics' sessions are now well established and having a clear impact. Children enjoy these sessions and are developing better skills as a result of them.

- You and the school's staff have ensured that children are provided with plentiful opportunities to enjoy books and share stories throughout the day. Equipment, such as musical instruments, is readily available to encourage children's listening skills. Staff lead activities such as sound walks around the garden, where children stop quietly and listen to what they can hear around them, when opportunities arise. However, activities are not planned systematically and this limits the coverage of some aspects of the school's chosen phonics scheme.
- Secondly, I looked at how well the school spends the early years pupil premium funding that it receives. I selected this area because, when checked, the school's website did not display information for the current academic year. This was a minor administrative error, because of which information had not been uploaded to the website, and up-to-date information was made available to me at the start of the inspection.
- A very small proportion of the children that attend the Nursery are eligible for early years pupil premium funding. As a result, the additional funding available to the school is similarly small. However, this does not prevent you from taking this aspect of the school very seriously. You assess children's individual needs as soon as they join the nursery. You then think carefully about what would benefit each child most and how you can monitor the impact of the spending. The early years pupil premium funding is spent very well.
- The third area that I chose to focus on was whether leaders have maintained the high standards of teaching evident during the previous inspection. You recognise that the quality of teaching and learning is the key to the school's effectiveness. You monitor the quality of teaching closely and regularly to ensure that it remains outstanding.
- Staff understand the needs of very young children extremely well. They are highly skilled at managing children's behaviour and encouraging their personal, social and emotional development. For example, we observed that, while working in a small group with a member of staff, one child shrieked and became upset when another child took the tube that he wanted to use. The member of staff encouraged the child to say, 'Please could I have my tube back?' The child was rewarded by the return of 'his' piece of equipment.
- Staff are also very effective at encouraging the development of children's speech and language skills. For example, we observed a small group of children making 'potions' with a member of staff in the school's outdoor 'mud kitchen'. The member of staff intervened skilfully, using well-chosen questions, to encourage children to think more deeply as they developed their concoctions.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- governors take a more strategic and evidence-based approach when evaluating how good the school is
- teachers plan specific opportunities for children to develop their phonics skills, as well as those opportunities that arise spontaneously.

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

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, senior leaders and a group of governors. I spoke with a representative of the local authority on the telephone. I spoke with parents as they brought their children to school. I considered the 52 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire and 49 free-text comments. I observed teaching and learning jointly with you. I looked at a range of school documents including the school's single central record of staff recruitment checks.