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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Ms Catherine Bolam
Headteacher
The Limes Nursery School
Johnsons Road
Whitehall
Bristol
BS5 9AT

Dear Ms Bolam

Short inspection of The Limes Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 20 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 good in June 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. All areas that were identified as needing to improve at that time have been rectified. You and your staff continue to provide a warm, nurturing environment and the school remains an asset to the local community.

You are very well supported by your strong and cohesive team of teachers and early years practitioners. The individual strengths of teachers are deployed particularly well to lead effective practice and ensure that provision is meeting the needs of all the children.

You and your governors have an accurate understanding of the effectiveness of the nursery school. Governors know its strengths and are clear about the areas that need developing further. This is because they are well informed by you and teachers with curriculum responsibility.

The professional development opportunities that you and your staff share with other local nursery schools are pivotal to your continuing success. You effectively use the expertise of headteacher colleagues to act as 'critical friends'. For example, they evaluate the quality of teaching and learning in your provision. You act on their feedback to make improvements to any areas which need strengthening. Your teaching staff also benefit from working with other nursery school colleagues. They test out initiatives together and share each other's expertise.

Although one or two parents and carers mentioned the recent unavoidable high

turnover of staff, most parents are fulsome in their praise and would recommend the nursery school to others. Their views can be summed up by one parent who explained, 'I feel so pleased with this nursery and so thankful for the excellent care my child receives.'

Safeguarding is effective.

All staff at the nursery school make effective use of their extensive safeguarding training to ensure that the children are kept safe and secure. They know their families well and vigilantly check for any signs of concern. Working closely with external agencies, they make sure that vulnerable children are given the appropriate care and specialist attention they need.

Governors have a secure understanding of their role in safeguarding the children who attend the nursery school. Those responsible for appointing staff have received safer-recruitment training and make sure appropriate checks are carried out before new employees start their job.

The provision of a carefully looked after environment ensures that children are kept safe and free from any potential dangers. Parents report that their children feel safe at the nursery school. Suitably trained staff attend to the specific needs of the two-year-olds.

Inspection findings

- A particular strength of the nursery school is the way in which the outdoor learning environment is skilfully used to promote the children's knowledge and skills. Teaching staff encourage them to experience and enjoy all aspects of this exciting and stimulating environment. There is a sensible balance between activities which are led by adults and opportunities for children to work and play on their own, or together with their peers. As one parent commented, 'There is clearly a lot of time and energy invested in the children's daily activities to ensure that they are stimulated every day.'
- In the provision for the three- and four-year-olds, effective use is made of outdoor 'dens', where teachers and early years practitioners support small groups of children to develop their speaking and reading skills. For example, storytelling sessions in these 'dens' help learning to come alive. This stimulates the children's thinking and helps them to extend their vocabulary. By drawing a sequence of pictures which illustrate the story they are listening to, they develop their early reading skills well. Effective questioning by an adult ensures that these activities are extended to meet the needs of the most able children.
- You and your teaching staff have also been successful in increasing the significance of using writing as a form of communication. There are plentiful opportunities for children to develop their writing skills in the outdoor area. Children enjoy using the large boards to make maps or ensure that they are next in line for a turn on one of the large tricycles. They are very clear that the marks they make carry a meaning and are important to them.

- Teachers and early years practitioners make skilful use of the large outdoor sand pit as an effective teaching aid to promote mathematical and scientific concepts. Children were observed concentrating carefully on how they could transport heavy buckets of sand to the other end of the sandpit. They carefully weighed the different buckets to check that they 'balanced' and then discussed which ones were 'heavier or lighter'. The children then gave much thought to how they could move the buckets 'up or down' the slope. The teaching staff sensitively supported their activities by asking probing questions and encouraging the use of mathematical terminology.
- You and your teaching staff are proud of the way in which you have worked with the children to help them sort out any potential disputes. Staff intervene with sensitive questions such as, 'Do you have a problem? What can be done to help?' This promotes effective dialogue between the children.
- Teachers with areas of responsibility track carefully children's progress and make sure that the staff who are responsible for each individual are aware of any potential underachievement. You are fully aware that boys often do not do as well as girls, and are working on ways to address this. For example, you have considered those aspects of play which interest boys and are currently focusing on characters which inspire them in their play. Your teaching staff have also been working with other nursery schools, exploring how to promote the achievement of boys. Nevertheless, you know that there is still a way to go on this.
- We also talked about the poorly developed speaking skills of the children who attend the provision for two-year-olds. Although they are well cared for in a small, nurturing environment, the outdoor area does not match the richness of the outdoor learning area for the older children. This limits their opportunities to extend their vocabulary and develop their speaking skills.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the focus on improving the attainment of boys is maintained as a priority for all teaching staff
- the speaking skills of the two-year-olds is improved by providing further opportunities for the children to extend their speech and language skills in a stimulating outdoor area.

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

Yours sincerely

Lorna Brackstone
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and the acting deputy headteacher to discuss the nursery school's effectiveness. I had discussions with four governors, including the chair of the governing body. I met with the early years local authority officer. We visited the classrooms together and spent some time observing the children working and playing in the outdoor area. I examined documents, including information about the safeguarding of children, and the progress that they make in their learning. I also looked at the nursery school's self-evaluation document and improvement plan. I considered the 19 responses to Parent View and the 19 free-text comments. I spoke to a number of parents when they arrived for the morning session.