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Mrs Lyndsey Barnett
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Barnett

Short inspection of Highfield Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 6 March 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 October 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Since becoming executive headteacher of the school, you have been determined to develop a highly effective nursery school as part of the early years provision in the local community. Senior leaders and governors share your drive and ambition. Together you have substantially improved the provision and developed a strong team. Staff are committed to ensuring the best possible learning experience for each individual child. The stimulating learning environment and highly engaging curriculum ensures that every child thrives.

Children are happy and well cared for in school. Parents and carers are very positive. For example, one parent praised staff for being 'friendly and positive towards the children's needs'. Another parent appreciated the 'rich learning experiences and appropriate support' to allow her son to 'take risks, problem solve and explore the world around him'. You promote a nurturing ethos where children are valued and known well by you and your staff. As a result, children settle quickly into the nursery and learn and play well together.

Since your appointment in 2014, following the school's federation with Croyland

Nursery School, you have developed clear strategic plans for what is needed to shape the future of the school and bring about improvements. The school now offers provision for children from the age of two. You recognise that this has brought greater stability to the future of the nursery and that children are better prepared for their primary schools when they leave the nursery. Your accurate self-evaluation generates the school's policies and actions, and identifies the required staff training. For example, you recognised that the planning of activities and experiences for children needed to improve to better meet the needs of children. As a result, teachers now plan a range of exciting experiences which interest and motivate children in different areas of learning.

The governing body provides you and your leadership team with effective challenge and support. Governors have a good range of relevant skills and knowledge. They have a very good understanding of the school and make use of this knowledge to challenge and support. They have supported you in restructuring the school and successfully improve the quality of teaching and learning. This has been a significant factor in driving the substantial improvements across the nursery. The nursery is regularly used as a centre for good practice and professionals from other schools and settings visit to learn from you and your staff. As a result, leaders are highly reflective and constantly striving for the very best for all children.

You have dealt very effectively with the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Adults now use their questioning skills well to extend children's thinking and help them understand. There are regular, well-planned opportunities for children to work with adults on focused activities. During these small-group sessions adults provide high-quality teaching for children in specific areas of the curriculum and particularly in early reading, writing and mathematics skills.

You have reviewed the way you assess the performance of the school to enable leaders to have a better overview of the strengths and the areas to develop. You have ensured that plans for the development of the school are precisely targeted and responsibilities for improvements are shared across the federation. As a result, leaders, including governors, are better able to regularly review and evaluate the impact of their actions and identify next steps.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have created a good culture of safeguarding within the school. Governors and staff benefit from regular and relevant training on child protection. They know what to do to keep children safe. Senior leaders and the family support worker work well with families and refer concerns in a timely manner. Staff are vigilant and are prepared to take decisive and prompt action, when needed, to secure children's well-being. Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Children enjoy coming to school. The environment provides suitable challenge for children to develop independence and learn how to manage risks in a safe and controlled way. For example, children worked together to help each other cross a

bridge they had built out of tree stumps and wooden planks. They also rode trikes up and down slopes teaching themselves how to slow down and steer around corners.

Inspection findings

- A focus for the inspection was the quality of teaching and learning for disadvantaged children. You and your staff are determined that disadvantaged children will acquire the knowledge, skills and understanding to match those of other children by the time they leave the nursery. You understand the potential for these children to make even greater gains. These children are already developing very positive learning behaviours and understand what is expected. They are able to work with increasing concentration and resilience as a result of greater exposure to the high-quality provision.
- The amount of additional funding the school receives for disadvantaged children is often very limited. Full use is made of this funding to provide additional care and learning support, particularly to develop children's communication and language skills. This support is having a positive impact on improving the achievement of disadvantaged children. Leaders also provide good-quality pastoral support for these pupils and their families to enable children to attend school regularly and make a good start to their education.
- The progress of disadvantaged children is not tracked as precisely as it could be to enable governors to effectively evaluate the impact of leaders' actions to ensure that these children make good progress and attain as well as their peers.
- During the inspection I also looked at how you ensure that teaching in the nursery meets the needs and interests of all children. Good communication with parents enables staff to plan exciting learning experiences for children that inspires them to want to find out more. Teachers continually assess the progress children make in their learning to make sure it is at least good and to ensure that the provision meets their needs. The range of these activities within the nursery enables children to access learning in different ways. For example, I observed children developing their understanding of capacity and volume. They played in the water tray using different-sized containers. Adults modelled appropriate mathematical language and challenged children to compare different quantities. As a result, children were enthusiastic learners. I also observed children playing outside using straw, bricks and logs to build a house for the three little pigs. The adult used skilful questioning to encourage children to extend their thinking and to work together.
- The majority of children start the nursery with limited knowledge and skills and often delayed communication and language. An increasing number of children speak English as an additional language. Effective, caring relationships enable children to settle into the nursery quickly. Teaching is supported by highly structured routines and clear expectations. Children understand the routines exceptionally well and quickly develop confidence. They wait patiently, take turns, share and help one another to tidy up. Early writing, reading and mathematics skills are taught very effectively so that by the time they leave the

nursery children are very well prepared for the next stage of their education.

- Transition arrangements are highly effective. Parents commented favourably on how well you prepare children for school. Staff visit children and their parents in their homes to establish good relationships before children start the nursery. You welcome parents to stay in the nursery until their children feel settled and happy. Children are well prepared for their move from the nursery to primary school. You ensure that the curriculum prepares children for their primary school and liaise well with colleagues working in the primary schools to ensure that children make a good start to their new schools. Precise information is shared about each individual child at points of transition, including within the nursery. This results in a smooth move from home to nursery and then into school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the progress of children who are in receipt of the early years pupil premium is explicitly tracked so that leaders, including governors, have a more accurate understanding of the impact of the additional funding on children's outcomes.

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

Yours sincerely

Stephanie Innes-Taylor

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you and the assistant headteacher, who is also acting as headteacher while you are completing a phased return to work after your maternity leave. I spoke with parents at the beginning of the school day. I met with members of the governing body and had a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority.

We visited classrooms together and I spoke with children and discussed what they were doing. I looked at a range of evidence of children's achievements and teachers' plans for provision and learning. We discussed the progress of different groups of children and the school's plans for improvement. I considered the responses of 21 parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. I also considered the responses of five members of staff to Ofsted's online survey for them. There were no responses to the pupil survey. I scrutinised evidence from a range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school's current performance, procedures and records for safeguarding and behaviour, information on how

additional funding is spent, an analysis of attendance and a number of policy documents.