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Ms Christine Branscombe
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Branscombe

Short inspection of Stoneygate Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 13 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 outstanding in 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of outstanding as a result of this inspection.**

When inspectors last visited the school, leaders were asked to improve links with local primary schools. In subsequent years, staff and leaders achieved this. You strengthened links with colleagues working in the Reception classes of some local schools. This included some joint training, increased visits between schools and better sharing of information. Leaders assist Nursery staff to better understand what skills and abilities children are expected to hold on entry to primary school. You continue to establish fresh links with primary schools wherever you can, because children join a large number of different schools when they leave.

Leaders set out a clear and ambitious vision for what they want the school to achieve. Leaders and governors use each change facing the school as an opportunity to improve provision for children and their families. For example, the school now provides new and successful provision for two-year-old children. Leaders make sure that staff teach children to investigate, talk and think. The curriculum includes many opportunities for children to learn outdoors, including for two-year-olds to write with chalks and paintbrushes. Extra activities include important trips, for example to learn about birds at Brockholes Wetland nature reserve.

Parents and carers continue to be highly satisfied with the work of the school. They told me that their children settle easily and grow quickly in confidence. They said that staff

and leaders adapt their work as much as possible to meet their individual family needs. Parents say that staff identify solutions to difficulties, rather than dwelling on problems. A typical comment was, 'They make it easier for you as a parent'.

Leaders and staff celebrate children's learning and present key information for parents in attractive displays on walls throughout the school. Children, including those who speak English as an additional language, settle quickly to activities. Children relate well to one another and to their special member of staff. Teachers and teaching assistants help children to develop many essential skills such as reading, writing and counting. Even so, we agreed that this effective practice is inconsistent and not all staff teach children as successfully as others. You recognise that this is a priority for improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, staff and governors hold a clear understanding of the local risks to children and their families. Staff recognise what symptoms may indicate that children or families need help. Staff know how to act, for example, if a child makes a disclosure of harm. Staff know how to spot signs of children or adults being exposed to radicalised views of Britain. Staff and leaders check diligently that children and parents feel safe and happy.

Leaders check that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders' recording of issues is thorough and they review information regularly. Staff give children regular opportunities to learn about staying safe. Staff check the identity of visitors thoroughly and keep the school premises secure.

Leaders attend courses about specific safeguarding issues to complement their required training. They give all staff regular updates about local and national safeguarding issues. The link governor for safeguarding has a precise understanding of the care and protection of children and families. She checks on the work of the school regularly.

Inspection findings

- School information and my inspection evidence indicate that staff assist children to become confident, skilled learners but the quality of teaching varies. Staff often adapt their questions and language skilfully to the needs of children. They listen carefully and patiently to children. Staff guide children to think and to reason. This effective practice is inconsistent. Teaching is less successful when staff talk too much, give children too little time to think, or miss opportunities to extend children's problem-solving skills. This means that children do not make strong and sustained progress in their learning.
- The provision for two-year-olds is a new and successful part of the school. Staff provide children with cosy areas in which to play and relax. They plan activities carefully to help children to communicate their ideas and feelings. Staff give children regular opportunities to be active outdoors. Leaders develop staff's understanding of important topics, such as how to support children to enjoy books, rhymes and songs and learn the sounds that letters represent. Staff talk with children gently and supportively. They develop routine activities, including nappy changing, as a happy learning experience. Parents say that they appreciate the efforts by school staff to

teach their children the skills to take themselves to the toilet.

- Leaders and staff make sure that children learn through frequent and meaningful activities outdoors. For example, children run with staff as part of a game of 'hide and seek' or climb up and along high climbing frames. During the inspection, a teaching assistant skilfully assisted a group of children to beat a large drum in rhythm with the story 'Walking through the Jungle'. Children were highly engaged. They were inspired to practise for themselves later. Parents say that they are pleased that the school provides children with waterproofs, so they learn outdoors, whatever the weather.
- Leaders develop links with the federated Appletree Nursery School well. For example, the deputy headteacher from Appletree is supporting staff's work at Stoneygate. Her thoughtful guidance is leading to some success in improving staff's arrangements to assess children. Parents say that they are impressed with staff's knowledge of their children. However, it is too soon to see the full impact of the increased advice on the quality of teaching. Clear plans are in place to continue the checks, training and support for staff.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- staff learn from the best teaching in the school so they make the most of all opportunities to support children's learning and improve their 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 Lancashire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tim Vaughan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and other school leaders to discuss how well the school is improving. You and I observed children's learning in classrooms and outdoors. I met with some parents during the day. I considered one free-text response to the Ofsted Parent View survey. There were too few other survey responses from parents to analyse. I met with four governors, one of whom participated in the meeting by telephone. I met with the school adviser. I reviewed your checks of staff's suitability to work with children. I checked a sample of your records about safeguarding.